ETHICAL ASPECTS IN CONTEMPORARY HEALTH RESEARCH

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Evelynne Hildegard Marques de Melo[1], Railson van Silva Barboza[2], Ana Paula Miyazawa[3], Cristiane Monteiro da Cruz[4], Raphaella Costa[5] and Adriana de Lima Mendonça[6].

ABSTRACT

In contemporary times, research that deals with health issues, in general, tends to reproduce some guiding criteria in the construction and execution of the subjects involved. The current system of academic data production, as support for decision-making in society happens in a dynamic and intense way. Considering the logic of high productivity in academic publications, this article aims to discuss ethical aspects related to health research in contemporary times, keeping a close eye on the use of elements that help in the elaboration of authentic and ethical scientific research. The methodology included a selection of articles related to the theme to support a discussion, through a literature review and bibliographic survey. It is concluded that the dynamic flow for productivity in publications tends to weaken the rigor in ensuring the ethical aspects related to research, which also demonstrates that it is not depending on the construction of norms/rules, but rather on a particular commitment of the researcher. This is a challenge to be faced in the academic universe and given that the final product is a document (scientific article) publicly offered to nourish decision makers, there is a great responsibility in the final part that lies with the editorial boards of the journals that hold the manuscripts.

Keywords: Ethics. Contemporaneity. Health. Research.

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[1] Student
Doctoral Graduate Program in Society, Technologies and Public Policies SOTEPP-UNIMA-AL
Address: Campus Cruz das Almas, Maceió – AL
E-mail: emmvet@gmail.com

[2] Master in Social Policy
Student
Graduate Program in Social Policy - Fluminense Federal University (UFF)
Address: Rua Professor Marcos Waldemar de Freitas Reis, Bloco E, 3rd floor
Niterói – RJ

[3] Teacher
Doctoral Graduate Program in Society, Technologies and Public Policies SOTEPP-UNIMA-AL
Address: Campus Cruz das Almas, Maceió – AL

[4] Teacher
Doctoral Graduate Program in Society, Technologies and Public Policies SOTEPP-UNIMA-AL
Address: Campus Cruz das Almas, Maceió – AL

[5] Teacher
Doctoral Graduate Program in Society, Technologies and Public Policies SOTEPP-UNIMA-AL
Address: Campus Cruz das Almas, Maceió – AL

[6] Teacher
Doctoral Graduate Program in Society, Technologies and Public Policies SOTEPP-UNIMA-AL
Address: Campus Cruz das Almas, Maceió – AL

INTRODUCTION

First, for a more solid understanding of the themes that will be debated and analyzed, it is necessary to base it on the definitions of the subject investigated. When we started the debates, we realized that there is a need to guide health research professionals with regard to the criteria and guiding principles of all stages of scientific research.

According to Castilho and Kalil (2005, p. 346), we observe that the document prepared by the National Health Council (CNS) on ethics in medical research "mixes ethical aspects of research with issues and aspects of biosafety and health surveillance". This, for a good part of the scholars on the subject, may explain the non-implementation of the resolution in a comprehensive way. In order to universalize demands and guide the empirical sieves and contents, the National Research Ethics Committee (CONEP) was created with the purpose of substantiating the Consent Form, understood from the perspective, according to Castilho and Kalil (2005, p. 346), that one cannot have "any type of limitation to influence the will and decision of the research subject", bearing in mind that the subject of the research is not only information, but the search for clarification. CONEP has in its nature to be a collegiate, consultative, deliberative, educational, independent, normative instance formed in accordance with the National Health Council (CNS) (Castilho and Kalil, 2005).

Likewise, we note that after resolution 196/96, which created the so-called Research Ethics Committees (CEPs), the purpose of examining ethical issues in research with human beings throughout the territory was fostered according to the evaluation of three principles: consent of the subject; maintenance of the privacy of the subject's information; approval by peers and by the community (Castilho and Kalil, 2005).

Starting from this premise, with the application of the meaning of morality, or its understanding as a theory about the understanding of what would be right and wrong, we deal with its approaches from some perspectives: normative, when they manifest standardized bad or good actions, or descriptive, when people report their beliefs and actions, in addition to the analysis of concepts and their methods (Beauchamp and Childress, 2002). The constitution of ethics in research is in any case fundamental since, according to Castro e Silva, Mandes and Nakamura (2012, p),

> if we think that the choice of a theme or object of study is related to a singular life trajectory, in which at all times the researcher must ask himself how to reconcile the constitution of the ethical posture in relation to the researched with their desires, dreams, curiosities and expectations.

Seeking the values and importance of ethical aspects in contemporary health, which should encompass research that carries singularities, subjectivities, in order to constitute new knowledge and perspectives, ratifies the importance in the debate on ethics in its general sense, or as Castro e Silva et al (2012) says,

> In advance, we can affirm that the notion of ethics linked to research means much more than compliance with formal research protocols, such as the signing and collection of free and informed consents. Reduced to the formality of the contract signed between researcher and researched, research ceases to fulfill its main function, which is to enable the former to reflect on his ethical posture in scientific production.

Finally, from these dimensions, we will be able to debate fundamental themes so that the process of building trust and respect, both of the researcher and the researched, is gradually improved and specialized, so that research faithfully fulfills its duty as a builder of knowledge.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this article is to discuss the ethical aspects that are linked to research, based on the notion of the concept of ethics and the development of scientific research, in view of its contribution to the understanding of the inseparable relationship between ethical aspects and research, also to the researcher himself, especially those that are focused on collective health.

JUSTIFICATION

The importance of discussing the theme involves several factors that range from the appropriate behavior of the researcher, as a receiver and constructor of the analysis, taking into account that steps, information, contents, authorizations, in addition to the uniqueness and privacy of the research subject, that is, the one who has the reports and shares them, must be respected, in order to "obtain the expected integrality in the research, which requires much more ethical behavior than a formula (Castilho and Kalil, 2005). Thus, when we focus on the research and the demands of the current dynamism of the public sphere, we can neglect important factors to develop a serious and impactful research for the environment. From this, we ask: does the rush to publish neglect ethics in research?

For the purposes of understanding, as stated by Castro e Silva et al, (2012) the "qualitative methods in health research require an initial clarification. When talking about method, it is necessary to differentiate it from techniques, so as not to reduce it to a merely instrumental aspect". The epistemological developments in the production of knowledge, which can often opt for theoretical references to the detriment of collecting references opposed to those that are considered classical, must be consonant with the identification of a bibliography capable of leading the researcher to his limits and possibilities, so that there are no risks to the integrality of the research.

Another factor that justifies the need to keep the discussion always open to the ethical and guiding principles of health research is based on the researcher/research sponsor relationship. As much as the researcher must seek the proper information about the funder, so that his right to choose and autonomy in the elaboration of the research is preserved, he may still have conflicts of interest. This is confirmed by Castilho and Kalil (2005), when they discuss that there are "several cases reported in the medical literature of these conflicts of interest implying important ethical problems". Most of these problems arise from the lack of clarification and the lack of notes of the discomforts, risks and possible benefits that the research process generated.

The literature confirms the difficulties in finding clear and objective norms that can guide public health research projects and submissions, which mostly involve ethical issues. In this way, we expose the statement of Souto, Lucena, Cavalcanti and França (2011, p. 56):

> There are several ethical aspects related to research with secondary data, however, confidentiality, privacy, and individual consent were mentioned in most studies and it can be inferred that these are the most prevalent ethical dilemmas in this type of research.

Thus, the importance of retaining attention to the use of informed consent of those who will participate in the research, the use of secondary data, the use of images and their alterations in accordance with the rules of law in force under them, as well as full compliance with the methodological instruments of the research ethics committees and the commitment of the researcher to ensure that the ethical aspects related to research are complied with, justify the need to debate the topic directly, in order for "*ethical intentions to be transformed into ethical actions*" (Amorim, 2019, p. 1039), respecting the dignity of the human being.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed the literature review instrument, consulting productions that debated the central subject of the production, in order to raise contents that can help in the construction of an adequate literature. From the perspective of Lévy *apud* Brizola and Fantin (2016), the production of knowledge is built collectively, and therefore "some care must be taken by those who propose to carry out research", since "a new research intends to address some bias that complements or contests what other researchers have already stated" (Brizola and Fantin, 2016, p. 23). Thus, literature review is "the gathering, the joining of ideas from different authors on a given topic, achieved through readings, research carried out by the researcher" (Brizola and Fantin, 2016, p. 27).

Also resorting to bibliographic research makes it possible to survey theoretical approaches that have already been published, such as books, scientific articles, considering that any scientific research is based on bibliographic research, which permeates the subject and ensures the researcher a solid basis to approach its content, deepening his knowledge about the object of research (Fonseca, 2012).

DEVELOPMENT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

In order to understand what it is about, it is necessary to define and expose the object. The Informed Consent Form (ICF), according to Souza et al (2013, p.201) , is an "explanatory document, where all issues related to the clinical study that may be related to the research subject's decision are agreed upon, and thus ensure voluntary participation". Its application in an appropriate way generates a more ethical treatment in the relationship between researcher and researched, encouraging respect for human rights, and for this reason its growing increase in recent years has been observed. However, poor compliance with the informed consent form means that the number of suspensions of clinical studies by ethics councils, as in the United States, is high and the greatest cause among others.

The complexity of the information and its reading can impair the understanding of the research subjects, exposing, as stated by Souza et al (2013, p.204), "the absence or inadequacy of informed consent". This may be rooted in the very choice of the group to be analyzed, taking into account its particularities and subjectivities, such as cultural, school, social, economic, political, etc. In the words of Souza et al (2013, p.204), "according to the readability indices found, the texts proved to be difficult to understand, requiring greater education from the research subjects".

Thus, there is a need to create consent forms with appropriate language, according to the specificities of each group to be analyzed, so that conflicts in participation are increasingly smaller and there is acceptance and understanding of what is requested.

> Despite the high acceptance rates of the ICF, it is necessary to analyze the new methods of application of the informed consent, so that the research subjects with less education can fully understand the study proposals. (Souza et al, 2013, p. 205)

Through this perspective, we observe that future projects should include these reflections (Messer, 2004), with the possibility of adhering to other means that help the research subject to understand the study, such as visual resources or explanatory videos.

USE OF SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data are contents already collected or recorded by various sources, available for consultation and use in future research and studies. Its importance lies in the permission to carry out new studies, with more details, facilitating the development of new strategies and actions in public health. As a result, the reduction in time in the construction of research material contributes to greater dynamism, without the need for the help of field research.

With the democratization of scientific knowledge, through the internet, a greater scope of scientific production and the use of this data was made possible, as explained by Drummond et al (2009, p.9):

> However, the importance of these publications for the dissemination of scientific knowledge is recognized, as they are characterized by quality control by peers. The possibility of access to such publications has been expanded thanks to the democratization of the use of microcomputers, their growing dissemination in electronic media and the greater ease of use of the Internet. Through the internet, it is possible to have immediate access, in part or in full, to scientific articles published in indexed journals and made available by bibliographic databases.

As much as the encouragement to research professionals is greater compared to those who did not access such platforms, resulting in the expansion of discussions and theoretical contributions in the product of their work, there is still the danger of unbridled use and without due care in the production of research. The risks lie in the injury to data privacy and confidentiality, as well as individual consent, inferring ethical dilemmas that are "more prevalent in this type of research" (Souto et al, 2011, p.52)

The little discussion on the subject is also a risk factor when choosing to use this data, since in health this can even hurt the safety of medical records and patient data. In addition, the information may not be consistent with the central objective of the study, conflicting with the other parts of the text. With this, added to the time factor, the careless use of secondary data can affect the originality of the text itself, also added to the fact that the subject who produces an academic text is facing a challenge, that of writing, in addition to socializing people and building solid scientific knowledge (Pereira, 2023).

We also note that the lack of research on the aforementioned subject both in Brazil and in the world results, among other things, in the lack of guidance of researchers during the production of research with this methodology (Souto et al, 2011).

RESEARCHER'S COMMITMENT TO THE ETHICAL ASPECTS RELATED TO RESEARCH

To begin this debate, we emphasize, as in the words of Amorim (2011, p. 1035), that the "choice of the researcher should be guided by the needs and priorities of society", especially when they are being financed with public funds by the State, "however, this is not what is observed most of the time". The pressure for research, and the need to streamline time and follow a continuous flow of productions without the determined time required for their best construction, ends up facilitating the understanding that we must publish all the time, without carrying out in-depth research and with adequate ethical parameters. Amorim (2011, p.1036) assertively points out that it is observable that "many studies do not have a scientific and social justification to support them", or "do not follow scientific rigor, among other factors", and even so they choose to carry them out.

A logic of production for production's sake is guided, with an end in itself, it generates massive scientific production without the minimum ethical preparation for publications and dissemination of scientific content, but it sets its objective at obtaining an "excellent" curriculum (Amorim, 2011), that is, a utilitarian mechanism of production. More than imposing on researchers a burden of rapid academic production, it is necessary to stimulate their moral competence, which will help in carrying out actions and judgments in accordance with ethical principles (Rego, 2007).

In the same way, Amorim (2011, p. 1039) challenges us:

> (...) So, that an ethical culture in the area of research be stimulated and promoted, where those involved can recognize the challenges related to this process and have the sensitivity to act with equity, justice and respect, with responsibility towards current and future generations as a guide.

We agree that the Research Ethics Committees should approach these demands, with a view to an educational and responsible practice of scientific production, less utilitarian and more ethical, and thus it is necessary to have an intense work of basic training for new researchers, without excluding a recycling involving other researchers who work in this scientific area.

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES

The creation of research ethics committees in the national territory began in the 1988 resolution of the National Health Council (CNS), but was later consolidated in Resolution 196/96. The REC's have a multidisciplinary team, evaluating all stages of research with human beings, from the elaboration of the project to its final report and publication (Batista et al, 2012). Regarding its definition itself, Batista et al (2012, p.151) describe its attributions and its objective as an interdisciplinary organization.

> In the formation of the committee, there must be a maximum of 50% of its members from the same professional category, and the participation of people who are not focused on research must also be guaranteed. In other words, it is not a committee of researchers, but a representative group of society. The objective of the REC's is to analyze the protocols of biomedical investigation, in aspects related to the research subjects, the importance and relevance of the research.

In view of the various scenarios of data manipulation and collection, as well as the risks of lack of adequate schedule or included budget, passing through methodological flaws in the preparation of projects, we observed problems that, first of all, were not guided by ethics in their genesis. The CEP's main initiative was to be a promoter of ethical principles involving human rights, not being able to support particular rights to the detriment of the universal rights of the community. The holding of events, the training of its members, are mechanisms that can be used to leverage the quality of the committees, in addition to being in line with the main idea of when they are thought and formed.

> The constitution of a REC must avoid the mistake of attributing to its members the character of representatives of interest groups, as well as adherence to certain religious beliefs or certain corporatist institutions. The CEP is not a place for negotiation of corporate interests; The interest should be to evaluate the impact of research on the well-being of people's lives. (Batista et al, 2012, p.155)

The committees' evaluations must value responsibility and attention, taking into account that the content obtained will have a considerable impact on the scientific community and society. For a rich approach with regard to a certain theme, which has the need to gather strong elements for the production of a quantitative study, for example, the committees have an essential role in the field of publications, as they will evaluate which ones were coherent with the research project and the time needed to formulate the content.

Thus, the role of the REC in the dissemination of ethical norms in research with human beings is indispensable, including its role also in the education of the researcher and in the correct way to form an authentic research project (Muñoz, 2005).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Taking into account what has been exposed, we are faced with the phenomenon of dynamic flow in academic productivity, especially those related to health, which without the proper care and apparatus of the proper organisms that safeguard the primary elements for the constitution of good scientific research, the rigor in guaranteeing the ethical aspects related to research will become fragile. In any case, the subjective commitment of the researcher proves to be more effective than depending on the construction of norms/guiding rules, This is a challenge to be faced in the academic universe and in scientific productions in a broad way, and that given the final product is a document (scientific article) publicly available with the objective of forming decision makers, There is a great responsibility in the final part, which lies with the editorial boards and research ethics committees, in general.

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