

IFT - MALTA

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

Institute of Family Therapy – Malta
July 2022



INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

There is a general obligation to undertake research of merit (having pedagogic and/or scientific value) as well as maintaining the integrity of the academic discipline. The line of accountability becomes particularly important if there are breaches of ethical requirements or the research protocol has not conformed to required ethical standards.

Policy

The Institute's Research Ethics Committee will retain ultimate authority and responsibility. This does not in any way absolve the student and supervisor from their responsibilities should they breach recommendations issued by the Institute's Research Ethics Committee.

1. Specific requirements are:

- Protection of participants i.e., eliminate, mitigate, reduce any potential harm as a consequence of their involvement in research;
- Supervision by competent supervisors;
- Protection of supervisees from possible harm;
- Obligation to obtain and record informed consent from participants or appropriate other;
- Maintenance and preservation of confidentiality;
- Volunteered participation;
- Identification and remit of levels of authority in granting a favourable ethical opinion;
- Protection of the reputation of the Institute.

2. Institute Research Ethics Committee guiding principles are:

- Reasonableness (i.e., conform to the simple test that a lay person would judge the procedure sufficient for purpose);
- Manageability (i.e., limit administrative record keeping to its practicable minimum);
- Robustness (i.e., provide a sufficiently thorough and workable system fit for purpose);
- Accountability (i.e., place the responsibility for ethical conduct of the proposed research with the supervisor and student);
- All research activity carried out by students within the Institute is subject to submission to the Research Ethics Committee on the appropriate Research Ethics Form.

3. Structure

The first level of submission will be to the dissertation supervisor. Each student will be assigned a supervisor with whom she/he will discuss the ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in order to be able to carry out ethically correct research. The supervisor's role is to direct a student towards ethically correct research and to support the student in completing an Ethics Approval Form. It is the student's responsibility to submit the Ethics Approval Form to the Institute's Research Ethics Committee. The role of the Institute's Ethics Committee is to ensure ethically sound research is taking place by its registered students.

The Institute's Research Ethics Committee is made up of the Institute's Chairperson, a Member of the Institute, and an external member invited for the purpose.

4. Supervisor's responsibilities

The Chairperson of the Institute of Family Therapy-Malta is responsible for teaching and research carried out within the Institute and under the supervision of staff. S/he delegates responsibility to supervisors to ensure any trainee involved as researcher is aware of the Institute's ethical guidelines and that these guidelines are observed.

The generation of the research topic, soundness of the research design, and management of the student during the period that the research is conducted are primarily the responsibility of the supervisor.

Supervisors should be aware that there may be an ethical implication if the proposed methodology is faulty, so that the resulting collected data cannot be subjected to meaningful analysis. Technical proficiency of the research design is the responsibility of the supervisor and the supervisor is advised to participate in research methods sessions and consult with other supervisors and consultants to clarify appropriateness of the research method selected by student in consultation.

Supervisors of student research are therefore asked to make three assessments: the soundness of the research design, the risk loading of the research, and which level of ethical opinion is appropriate.

5. Research design

In projects involving primary data collection the scientific merit and quality of the research design is a matter of judgment for each supervisor e.g.

- viable estimate of the number of respondents
- appropriate control groups

- adequate informed consent
- adequate information sheet
- appropriate analytic methods
- relevant contextualising of research literature

In projects involving desk studies, analysis of secondary data supervisors may consider e.g.

- permissions necessary to conduct the secondary analysis
- viability of access to sources
- adequacy of analytic methods to undertake the analysis/review
- key references

The format which the supervisors wish students to submit their proposals should adhere to APA standards. This paperwork should be kept and be available for auditing purpose.

6. Procedure

Meeting schedule

The Institute Research Ethics Committee proposes to meet by two weeks after the students' deadline for the submission of research proposals and Institute's Ethics forms have been submitted. Another meeting may be called ad hoc as deemed necessary thereafter.

Submissions

Every student shall submit a copy of the research proposal together with a completed copy of the Institute's ethics form to his/her supervisor, and which the latter shall sign and hand over as approved to the Institute Research Ethics Committee. If the proposal requires a formal ethical opinion from Institute Research Ethics Committee, three copies of the proposal and three copies of the ethics form shall be submitted to the Institute Research Ethics Committee.

The Institute Research Ethics Committee will consider proposals sent to it and either

- Give a favourable opinion;
- Require some adjustments and render an opinion when satisfactorily dealt with;
- Refuse the application and ask for review of research and re-submission of proposal.

Details of all submissions will be recorded on a spreadsheet maintained by the Institute's office for auditing purposes.