FNU HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

Prepared by: OPVCR

Approving Authority: FNU Senate

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Contents

1.0 Purpose

This policy establishes the principles for human research ethics and the procedures for ethical reviews for research undertaken by all academic staff, Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students, undergraduate students, and academic visitors at Fiji National University (FNU), with human participants. It ensures that all FNU human research conforms to the highest ethical standards.

2.0 Definitions

For purposes of this policy, the following definitions shall apply:

Academic Staff	Includes all staff that have a contractual obligation to carry out research
FNU	Fiji National University
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
HREC Approval	Approval granted by FNU Human Research Ethics Committee, endorsed by PVCR
Human Research	Any investigation conducted with or about people, their data, or tissue
Participant	An individual research participant also called a human subject or an experiment, trial, or study participant or subject, is a person who participates in human subject research by being the target of observation by researchers[1].
PVCR	Pro Vice Chancellor Research
URC	University Research Committee

3.0 FNU Human Research Ethics Policy

It is important that all research at FNU is conducted to the highest standards of integrity when researching with humans. The university expects all researchers to consider the ethical implications of their research and to obtain ethics approval prior to commencing their research projects.

FNU's position on human ethical issues is guided by the following key principle:

a. **Voluntary** participation in research;
b. Obtaining **informed consent;**
c. Protecting **anonymity** and **confidentiality;**
d. Minimising the **risk of harm;**
e. Minimising potential disadvantage to **vulnerable person or a group**
f. Limitation of **deception;**
g. Providing the **right to withdraw;**
h. Avoidance of **Conflict of Interest** between the researcher and research participants**;** and
i. Minimising **researcher affiliation.**

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Research_participant

4.1. Voluntary Participation

All participants should be volunteers, taking part in the research without being coerced, deceived, or being obliged.

The use of incentives to encourage participation may be viewed as coercion. Researchers are to use discretion when using tokens as incentives.

4.2 Informed Consent

All participants should be informed, and they should fully understand the following vital information before they choose to participate:

a. the nature and purpose of the research;
b. that they will be part of the research;
c. what the research requires of them;
d. any potential benefits, risks, obligations, or inconvenience associated with the research; and,
e. their right to withdraw at any time as a participant without providing any reason.

Informed consent (generally in written form, or oral consent witnessed by another in exceptional circumstances) is to be obtained from participants. Details in the *Consent Form* is to be in a simple and non-expert format, i.e. in 'plain English'. Where required, these details are to be translated into the participant's first language.

Researchers are to gain assent from the child and consent from the child's parents/legal guardian for research involving children.

4.3 Protecting Anonymity and Confidentiality

Protecting research participants' anonymity and confidentiality is paramount for all FNU researchers since participants will only be willing to volunteer private or sensitive nature of information if the researcher assures them to hold such information in confidence.

Researchers should take preventative measures in terms of data storage, analysis, and publication process to avoid accidental breaches of confidentiality. Please refer to the *FNU Research Data Management Policy & Procedure for Staff, Adjuncts, HDR Candidates and Visitors*.

Where necessary, the researchers may seek permission to reveal the participant's identity and views during the dissertation's research process and publication. However, measures are to be taken to either remove all identifiers or provide proxies when writing up.

4.4 Minimising Risk of Harm

Researchers are to ensure that their research does not harm participants. Strong justification is needed where the possibility of participants being harmed or put in a position of discomfort is anticipated. This justification will also require:

a. additional planning on how participant harm (or discomfort) will be reduced;
b. informed consent;
c. limitation to deception; and
d. detailed debriefing.

There are many types of harm that participants can be subjected to during the research:

a. physical harm to participants;
b. psychological distress and discomfort (beyond what is encountered in daily life);

c. negative impacts on economic and social standing, or
d. an invasion of participants' privacy and anonymity.

Less than harm is 'discomfort', which can include minor side-effects of medication, the discomforts related to measuring blood pressure, or anxiety introduced by being interviewed.

Less than discomfort is 'inconvenience', which may include such activities as filling in a form or participating in a street or phone survey, or simply giving up time to participate in research.

The researcher should seek to minimise the risk of harm to any individual (all participants).

To minimise the risk of harm, researchers should:

a. ensure that all participants have read the *Participant Information Sheet* and have returned a signed *Consent Form* to the researcher;
b. protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants; and
c. provide participants with the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

4.5 Limitation to Deception

Deception is sometimes a necessary component of covert research[2]; however, it should only be practiced where absolutely necessary. It is where the identity of the observer and/or the purpose of the research is not disclosed to the participants. Such cases include instances where:

a. the researcher may deem necessary not to let all participants in a particular research setting know what you are doing; and/or
b. overt observation may alter the particular phenomenon that is being studied.

Deception of participants will only be allowable if appropriate and necessary justification has been provided for the departure from the standard of fully informed consent and its necessity for the success of the project.

Where deception has been used, the researcher holds the responsibility to provide participants with an explanation of the project's true purpose and the need for the deception and allow them to withdraw from participation from the project.

4.6 Providing the Right to Withdraw

Except for those instances of covert observation, research participants should always have the right to withdraw from the research process at any time without providing any justification.

Research participants reserve unconditional or absolute 'right' of withdrawal at any time and without giving any reason. Participants are not to be pressured or coerced from not withdrawing in any way when they decide to withdraw from the research.

The researcher should ensure that the participants fully understand their right to withdraw from the research at any time before completing and signing the *Participant Information Shee*t, *Consent Form,* and *Confidentiality Agreement*.

5.0 Human Research Ethics Application and Approval Procedure

Applications for Human Research Ethics (HRE) approval are to be made through the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor Research using the *Human Research Ethics Application Form*. Applications dealing with humans will be assessed and approved by the FNU HREC, endorsed by PVC Research.

[2] http://dissertation.laerd.com/principles-of-research-ethics.php

FNU HREC will meet every two months to assess the applications.

Researchers should ensure that they receive formal notification of approval from the OPVCR before commencing with any formal research procedures such as participant recruitment or data gathering.

The HREC will not award any retrospective approval.

Failure to gain approval may affect funding and publication decisions, as well as the submission of the thesis.

5.1 Approval Decision-Making Authority

The HREC has the authority to approve or decline any application.

The decision made by the HREC should reflect the consensus of recommendations made by other members of the committee responsible for reviewing the application.

The PVCR will endorse all HREC approval.

5.2 Appeals and Complaints

Where an applicant is dissatisfied with the decision of the HREC, they may appeal to the HREC and the University Research Committee, with clearly stated explanations and justification to the Manager Research Grants and Ethics at OPVCR, FNU.

6.0 Research at FNU by External Researchers

All external researchers researching at FNU without FNU staff collaboration will have to obtain relevant ethics approval, and will be charged a fee for research which is commensurate with the Ministry of Education Heritage and Arts fee for education research in Fiji:

External Researchers	Local Applicant	Overseas Applicant
Undergraduate	No Fees	No Fees
Post Graduate	FJD 20	FJD 50
Masters by Research	FJD 50	FJD 100
PhD	FJD 100	FJD 500
Organisations/Tertiary Institutions	FJD 200	FJD 500
Ministries/Government Departments	No Fees	FJD 500
Extension Fees above 3 months	FJD 50	FJD 200

Confidentiality of research data applies to all researchers at FNU as well as to external researchers.

7.0 Sanctions

Where FNU employees fail to obtain ethical approval when such approval is required or act contrary to the FNU HREC's decision, the matter may amount to misconduct and be dealt with under the university's *HR Code of Conduct Policy*.

Where a student acts contrary to the terms of the HREC's approval, the matter will be dealt with under *University Academic & Student Regulations*.

8.0 Related Documents

Human Research Ethics Application Form
Participant Information Sheet
Consent Form
Confidentiality Agreement

9.0 Approval Agency

Senate

10.0 Revision Log

This table will be used to insert dates of the different versions made on the policy/procedure.

Version	Date of Approval	Comment
1.0	11 December 2019	Approved by the Senate
2.0	2 March 2021	Approved by the Senate

11.0 Policy Sponsor

Pro Vice Chancellor Research

12.0 Contact Person

The following person may be contacted in relation to this policy:
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