

Code of Ethics

Approved by the ISA Executive Committee, Fall 2001

Introduction

The International Sociological Association's (ISA) Code of Ethics consists of a Preamble and four sets of specific Ethical Standards. Membership in the ISA commits members to adhere to it.

The Code of Ethics is not exhaustive, all-embracing and rigid. The fact that a particular conduct is not addressed specifically by the Code of Ethics does not mean the conduct is necessarily either ethical or unethical.

Preamble

Sociologists work to develop a reliable and valid body of scientific knowledge based on research and, thereby, to contribute to the improvement of the global human condition. The primary goals of the Code of Ethics, a symbol of the identity of the ISA, are (1) to protect the welfare of groups and individuals with whom and on whom sociologists work or who are involved in sociologists' research efforts and (2) to guide the behaviour and hence the expectations of ISA members, both between themselves and toward the society at large. Those who accept its principles are expected to interpret them in good faith, to respect them, to make sure they are respected and to make them widely known.

Each sociologist supplements the Code of Ethics in ways based on her/his own personal values, culture and experience. Each sociologist supplements, but does not violate, the standards outlined in this Code of Ethics. It is the individual responsibility of each sociologist to aspire to the highest standards of conduct.

The efficacy of a Code of Ethics relies principally upon the self-discipline and self-control of those to whom it applies.

Sociology as a field of scientific study and practice

As scientists, sociologists are expected to cooperate locally and transnationally on the basis of scientific correctness alone, without discrimination on the basis of scientifically irrelevant factors such as age, sex, sexual preference, ethnicity, language, religion or political affiliation.

1.2. Group work, cooperation and mutual exchanges among sociologists are necessary for sociology to achieve its ends. Sociologists are expected to take part in discussions on their own work, as well as on the work of other sociologists.

1.3. Sociologists should be aware of the fact that their assumptions may have an impact upon society. Hence their duty is, on the one hand, to keep an unbiased attitude as far as possible, while, on the other

hand, to acknowledge the tentative and relative character of the results of their research and not to conceal their own ideological position(s). No sociological assumption should be presented as indisputable truth.

1.4. Sociologists should act with a view to maintaining the image and the integrity of their own discipline; this does not imply that they should abandon a critical approach toward its fundamental assumptions, its methods and its achievements.

1.5. The principles of openness, criticism and respect for all scientific perspectives should be followed by sociologists in their teaching and professional practices.

1.6. Sociologists are expected to protect the rights of their students and clients.

Research procedures

2.1. Sponsors

2.1.1. Research activities in sociology must often necessarily rely on private or public funding, and thus depend to a certain extent on sponsorship. Sponsors, be they private or public, may be interested in a specific outcome of research. Yet, sociologists should not accept research grants or contracts which specify conditions inconsistent with their scientific judgment of what are appropriate means of carrying out the research in question, or which permit the sponsors to veto or delay academic publication because they dislike the findings.

2.1.2. Sponsors should be clearly informed in advance of the basic guidelines of research projects, as well as of the methods which researchers are willing to adopt. Sponsors also should be advised of the risk that the result of an inquiry may not fit with their own expectations.

2.1.3. Sponsors, both private and public, may be particularly interested in funding sociological research for the sake of their own political aims. Whether or not they share such aims, sociologists should not become subordinate to them. They should also refrain from cooperating in the fulfillment of undemocratic aims or discriminatory goals.

2.1.4. The conditions agreed upon between researchers and sponsors should preferably be laid down in written agreements.

2.2. Costs and rewards

2.2.1. Funds provided for sociological research should be used for the agreed purpose.

2.2.2. In a situation where sociologists are bidding competitively on projects, they should not agree to carry on research projects which are not sufficiently funded or compete with other bidders by the use of further unfair tactics not consistent with appropriate scientific standards.

2.3. Data gathering

2.3.1. As scientists, sociologists should disclose the methods by which they proceed as well as the general sources of their data.

2.3.2. The security, anonymity and privacy of research subjects and informants should be respected rigorously, in both quantitative and qualitative research. The sources of personal information obtained by researchers should be kept confidential, unless the informants have asked or agreed to be cited. Should informants be easily identifiable, researchers should remind them explicitly of the consequences that may follow from the publication of the research data and outcomes. Payment of informants, though acceptable in principle, should be discouraged as far as possible and subject to explicit conditions, with special regard to the reliability of the information provided.

2.3.3. Sociologists who are being given access to records are expected to respect the privacy conditions under which the data were collected. They can, however, make use of data gathered in historical archives, both private and public, under the legal conditions laid down in the country concerned and usually accepted by the international scientific community, and subject to the rules of the archive.

2.3.4. The consent of research subjects and informants should be obtained in advance. Covert research should be avoided in principle, unless it is the only method by which information can be gathered, and/or when access to the usual sources of information is obstructed by those in power.

Publication and communication of data

3.1. Data gathered in sociological research activities and research work constitute the intellectual property of the researchers, who are in principle also entitled to copyright. Should copyright be vested in a sponsor or in an employer, researchers should be entitled to fair compensation.

3.2. In principle, researchers have a right to submit their work for publication, or to publish it at their own expense.

3.3. Researchers have the right to ensure that their results be not manipulated or taken out of context by sponsors.

3.4. The contribution of scholars, sponsors, technicians or other collaborators who have made a substantial contribution in carrying out a research project should be acknowledged explicitly in any subsequent publication.

3.5. Databases should not be regarded as being in the public domain, until the researchers who have assembled them have specified the sources of their data and the methods by which they were constructed. Information about sources and methods should be made available within reasonable time. Interim data sets should be available for inspection of their accuracy by other scholars.

[Note: Statement already adopted by the ISA Executive Council in its Colima Meeting, 26-27 November 1996]

3.6. Once published, information about a research project should be considered to be part of the common knowledge and background of the scientific community. Therefore, it is open to comments and criticism to which researchers should be allowed to react.

Extra-scientific use of research results

4.1. The results of sociological inquiries may be a matter of public interest. Their diffusion, which is an implication of the fundamental right of people to be informed, should not be hindered. Researchers, however, should be aware of the dangers connected with distortions, simplifications and manipulations of their own research material, which may occur in the process of communication through individual or mass media. Researchers should be able, and are entitled, to intervene to correct any kind of misinterpretation or misuse of their work.

4.2. Researchers should refrain from claiming expertise in fields where they do not have the necessary depth of research knowledge, especially when contributing to public discussion or policy debate.