

SOP 16: Whistle-blowing Pertaining to Research

The South African College of Applied Psychology Research Ethics Committee	
Title	SOP 16: Whistle-blowing Pertaining to Research
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1. COMPILATION AND AUTHORISATION

Action	Designated person	Date	Signature
Compiled for SACAP by	Dr Malesa Kgashane	6 August 2021	
Amended for SACAP by	REC Office	26 October 2021	K. J. Young
Checked by	Academic Manager	12 November 2021	C.E. Ford
Authorised by	Academic Dean	20 January 2022	J.O. Lotter

2. DOCUMENT HISTORY

Date	Version no	Reason for revision
July 2021	1	Development of the document

3. DEFINITION OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation/ Term	Definition
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
REC	Research Ethics Committee

NHREC	National Health Research Ethics Council
PDA	Public Disclosure Act, 2000 (Act No 26 of 2000)
Whistle-blowing	The act of informing someone in authority about alleged research misconduct (fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism), fraud, maladministration, and non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies occurring at the SACAP. In relation to the context of this document, the alleged acts have to be related or incidental to the execution of research.
Ethics	The term "ethics" refers to standards of research conduct, which indicate how a person should behave based on moral duties and virtues arising from the principles of right and wrong. Ethics therefore involves two aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability to distinguish right from wrong; and • The commitment to do what is right as articulated in various pieces of legislation and guidelines regulating the execution of research.
Values	Refers to the beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment either for or against something.
Integrity	Refers to the quality or state of being of sound moral principle, trustworthiness, honesty, and sincerity.
Fraud	Involves actions or behaviour like dishonesty, deception or forgery by an individual, other person or entity that manipulate others or systems into providing a benefit that would not normally accrue to that person.
Misconduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves intentional deception during research conduct through fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. • Fabrication (making up research data or results and recording or reporting the fabricated material). • Falsification (manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research records. • Plagiarism (the appropriation of another person's research idea, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit); and • Misconduct also relates to any infringement of the guiding principles of ethical research, obligations of researchers towards human participants, and infringement of regulations relating to informed consent. <p>Note: Honest errors, differences of opinion, and disagreements are not research misconduct.</p>
Conflict of interest	Not classified as research misconduct. It could, however, undermine the integrity and trustworthiness of the research. Conflicts of interest should always be declared, as well as the precautionary measures that will be taken

4. PURPOSE OF THE SOP

This SOP sets out the procedure to follow when a member of the SACAP REC, a SACAP employee, SACAP student or research participant wants to raise concerns with the SACAP REC Chair. The concerned individual must have reasonable grounds to believe that there is:

- i. Misconduct;
- ii. Fraud;
- iii. Maladministration; or
- iv. Non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies committed by a researcher (employee and/or student) of SACAP in respect of research.

Members of the SACAP REC employees or students of SACAP, as well as research participants, enjoy the full protection afforded by the Public Disclosure Act No 26 of 2000 (PDA) and can blow the whistle on the four mentioned aspects without fear of disclosure.

This SOP ensures confidentiality to all members of the SACAP REC, employees or students of SACAP, or research participants and furthermore ensures that nobody would be exposed for disclosing in good faith information that would assist the SACAP REC Chair in meeting their obligation in terms of the guiding principles and regulations as set out in the procedures in Section 7.

5. SCOPE

This SOP deals only with alleged actions committed by researchers (employees and/or students of SACAP) within the ambit of research with respect to human participants, or environmental impact. The SOP deals primarily with, but is not limited to, misconduct, fraud, maladministration, and non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies as defined in the definition section below, only to the extent that they may relate to the principles and regulations as set out in the various reference documents mentioned under Section 8.

5.1. Concerns are raised with respect to matters relating to:

5.1.1. Misconduct:

- 5.1.1.1. Fabrication (making up research data or results and recording or reporting the fabricated material).
- 5.1.1.2. Falsification (manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research records).
- 5.1.1.3. Plagiarism (the appropriation of another person's research idea, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit).

5.1.2. Fraud.

5.1.3. Maladministration.

5.1.4. Non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines, or policies.

- 5.2. It is not the objective of this SOP to replace any other policies or procedures of SACAP, in particular, the Policy on Academic Integrity and the Policy on Research Ethics. Additionally, should the reported concern/irregularity not lie within the ambit of research, the whistleblower should contact the relevant College department directly to report the concern.
- 5.3. In the case of research related concerns and irregularities, whistle-blowers may submit a whistleblowing form on the SACAP website in the dedicated whistleblowing section. The whistle-blower form makes provision for whistle-blowers to report the details surrounding the alleged concern and may additionally choose to remain anonymous.

- 5.4. All reports are forwarded to the SACAP REC so that issues that have been reported can be followed up and investigated. The provision is that the disclosure is made in good faith, in the reasonable belief of the individual making the disclosure that it shows irregularities in research practices, and the disclosure is made to the appropriate person(s).
- 5.5. Personal grievances must be dealt with in terms of existing labour procedures at SACAP. This SOP should not be used to reconsider any matter that has already been addressed under harassment, complaint, disciplinary or other procedures.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1. SACAP is committed to the highest standard of ethics and integrity in research. Researchers of the institution are expected to behave in an honest and responsible way at all times. Research activities will be carried out in an open and transparent manner and in accordance with the code of conduct for SACAP researchers stipulated in the Policy on Research Ethics and the Policy on Academic Integrity.
- 6.2. Any member of the SACAP REC, staff member, student of SACAP or research participant who has a reasonable belief that any act of misconduct, fraud maladministration, or non-adherence to approved research procedures, guidelines or policies has been committed, is obligated in terms of this SOP to report any such unethical research practices. The procedure as described in section 8 of this SOP is followed.
- 6.3. Any whistle-blowing should be done in a bona fide and non-vindictive manner.

7. PROCEDURE(S)

- 7.1. A disclosure should be made in writing using the official whistle-blower form (*Annexure A of SOP 16: Whistleblowing Pertaining to Research*). This form is submitted to the SACAP REC Administrator who forwards this to the SACAP REC Chair and Vice Chair.
- 7.2. When a SACAP REC member, a SACAP staff member, SACAP student or research participant makes a disclosure to the SACAP REC Chair, it must be done in a responsible and honest manner.
- 7.3. Upon receipt of the Complaint Form the SACAP REC Administrator acknowledges receipt of the disclosure via email to the whistle-blower and immediately (within three days) notify the SACAP REC Chair.
- 7.4. The SACAP REC Chair will immediately upon receipt of the disclosure set up an appointment with the whistle-blower, other relevant persons, and the legal representative of the REC (investigating team) within fourteen working days of acknowledging the disclosure.
- 7.5. The aim of this appointment is to allow the investigating team to conduct an initial investigation in order to establish whether there is a prima facie case to answer.
- 7.6. If the investigating team considers that there is no prima facie case to be answered and that no further action will be taken, this decision will be explained to the whistle-blower.
- 7.7. If the investigating team considers that there is a prima facie case to be answered, the way forward is discussed to the satisfaction of all parties, and may require a respondent to complete the complaints form to be submitted by the person/entity against whom/which the complaint is lodged (*See Annexure B of SOP 16: Whistleblowing Pertaining to Research*).

- 7.8. If disciplinary measures are required, the Chair of the SACAP REC will follow the appropriate SACAP Policy as outlined in the SACAP Student Handbook.
- 7.9. Investigations will be dealt with sensitively on an impartial basis and within a reasonable time frame.
- 7.10. Details of the allegation, the identity of the person making the allegation and against whom the allegation is made will remain confidential.
- 7.11. The SACAP REC Chair and legal representative of the REC can request the assistance of an independent person. Those requested to assist in the investigation will be chosen on the basis of being independent from the issues/events from which the allegation has been initiated.
- 7.12. The Academic Head of the institution (Academic Dean) is notified of the reporting and the actions taken. If necessary, the Dean is included in the actions.
- 7.13. If the whistle-blower is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, they should raise their concerns with the Academic Head of the institution (Academic Dean) to find another solution or to refer them to a higher authority.
- 7.14. The NHREC is notified of the complaint, actions and or resolutions.

8. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- Department of Health. (2015). *Ethics in health research: Principles, processes, and structures*.
- Government Gazette. (2014, September 19). *Regulations relating to research with human participants* (No. 38000).
- HSREC. (n.d.). *Whistleblowing pertaining to research* (SOP13.1).
- *Public Disclosure Act*, Act No. 26 of 2000.
- NHREC. (n.d.). Response form.
- The National Health Act, No. 61 of 2003.

**ANNEXURE A:
WHISTLEBLOWER FORM**

SECTION 1: PERSONAL DETAILS	
Name of complainant:	
Phone:	
Email:	
SECTION 2: DETAILS OF PERSON/ENTITY AGAINST WHOM/WHICH THE COMPLAINT IS LODGED	
Name	
Phone:	
Email:	
SECTION 3: COMPLAINT DETAILS	
The complaint/query relates to: <i>(tick all appropriate box/s)</i>	
Conduct in an approved study	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conduct of a researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informed consent process	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inappropriate communication	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human participant well-being/monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
About the REC in general	<input type="checkbox"/>
About alleged protocol/approval violations	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and safety issues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conflict of interest	<input type="checkbox"/>
General REC processes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Animal well-being/monitoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research/fieldworker wellbeing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Data security	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guidance or clarification	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <i>(please insert all relevant details below)</i>	
SECTION 4: NATURE OF THE COMPLAINT	
If the complaint pertains to a particular research project, please provide the following information (if available)	
Title of the research study	
Name(s) of the researcher(s)	
Contact details of the researcher(s)	

Site(s) at which research is being conducted			
Name of ethics committee that approved the study			
Please provide sufficient details of the complaint, with supporting evidence if possible.			
SECTION 5: DECLARATION BY THE COMPLAINANT			
I hereby declare that the above submission is accurate and true to the best of my knowledge.			
Name			
Signature		Date	

OFFICIAL USE			
TO BE COMPLETED BY SACAP REC CHAIR			
In my opinion the details provided: (tick appropriate box)			
Do not constitute a prima facie case and no further action is required, this decision will be explained to the whistle-blower in writing or telephonically.			
Do constitute a prima facie case (please provide a detailed action plan below)			
Action plan (if applicable):			
Full Name			
Signature		Date	