



Publisher

African Journal of Social Work

Afri. j. soc. work

© National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Author(s)

ISSN Print 1563-3934

ISSN Online 2409-5605

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A sample ethics application to the African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) for research on social work with women victims of violence in Morocco

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a sample of an ethics application to the African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC). It is based on research with women victims of violence in Morocco, grounded in the African Ubuntu philosophy. Emphasizing interconnectedness and community respect, this ethical approach aims to enhance care for victims of gender-based violence through community-oriented and empathetic methods. At the end of this sample application, there are three appendices: the ethics application form of the AIEC, eight basic Ubuntu ethics in research and guidance on how to write an ethics statement. By sharing this sample application, and the appended information, authors intent to share knowledge of ethics planning in research with learners, academics, researchers, members of ethics boards, reviewers, editors and publishers in Africa and beyond.

KEY TERMS: African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC), ethical research, ethics statement, Morocco, Ubuntu ethics, Ubuntu philosophy, women victims of violence

KEY DATES: Received: May 2024 | Revised: May 2024 | Accepted: June 2024 | Published: August 2024

KEY DECLARATIONS: Funding: None | Permission: Not applicable | Conflict of Interest: None | Ethics approval: Not applicable

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HOW TO REFERENCE USING ASWDNET STYLE

Mrabti, L. & Belamfedel Alaoui, Z. (2024). An ethics application for research on social work with women victims of violence in Morocco. *African Journal of Social Work*, 14(4), 174-184. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v14i4.1>

Title of your research

Social Work and Women's Violence Care in Morocco

Vulnerable population

Young women

Philosophical foundation that shaped the ethics plan

The philosophical foundation of the ethics in this study on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) care in Morocco is deeply rooted in the African Ubuntu philosophy. Ubuntu, often encapsulated in the phrase "I am because we are," highlights the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of individuals within a community, emphasizing respect, compassion, and dignity. In this research, our statement of African Ubuntu ethics is articulated through the commitment to enhance the care for women victims of violence by focusing on community-oriented and empathetic approaches. This ethical perspective underpins the methodology and engagement strategies used in the study, ensuring that the research processes and outcomes honor the dignity and rights of the participants and contribute positively to the community. This Ubuntu-driven ethical approach has shaped the ethics plan of the study in several critical ways. It has guided the development of research protocols that prioritize informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for the participants. Furthermore, it has influenced the framing of interviews and interactions with social workers, emphasizing understanding their challenges and contributions within their community context. This approach ensures that the research not only adheres to high ethical standards but also resonates with the local cultural and ethical norms, fostering trust and cooperation from the community and participants involved.

The gap, rationale and aim for the research

This research addresses the knowledge gap regarding the challenges and practices of social workers in Morocco's Integrated Care Units for Women and Children Victims of Violence (ICUWCVV). It tackles the urgent need to enhance skills and resources, emphasizing a multidisciplinary approach to improve care quality. The aim is to develop more effective interventions tailored to the specific needs of gender-based violence victims, while informing future policies and practices.

Permissions, consents and approvals

Community and family permissions are an essential part of ethical research. For this study, permissions, consents, and approvals were systematically obtained from multiple sources to ensure ethical integrity and compliance with both local and institutional regulations. Initial approval was secured from the Regional Health Directorate of Fès-Meknès, which reviewed the research proposal to ensure it met ethical standards for research involving human participants. Prior to conducting interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participating social workers. Each participant was provided with a consent form that detailed the study's purpose, the nature of their involvement, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. This process was conducted in person, allowing participants to ask questions and receive immediate clarifications. Additionally, community permissions were sought from the leaders of the communities where the ICUWCVVs are located. These were crucial to gain the community's trust and support,

fostering a conducive environment for the research. Meetings were held with community leaders to explain the study's goals and potential benefits to the community and to address any concerns they might have. This multi-level approach ensured that the research adhered to ethical norms and respected the rights and welfare of all involved, aligning with the principles of Ubuntu ethics that emphasize communal respect and dignity.

Participants actions

In this research, participants, who are social workers in the Integrated Care Units for Women and Children Victims of Violence (ICUWCVV) in Morocco, will be asked to engage in semi-structured interviews. These interviews will explore their experiences, challenges, and practices within their professional roles. To minimize any potential harm or distress, several measures are in place

Avoidance of participants harm, risk, distress and burden—physically, culturally, socially, economically, psychologically or otherwise

Informed Consent: Prior to the interviews, all participants will receive detailed information about the study, including its purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, ensuring they can make an informed decision to participate.

Confidentiality: All data collected will be handled with strict confidentiality. Identifiers will be removed from the transcripts, and only aggregated data will be used in reporting to protect participants' privacy and personal information.

Cultural Sensitivity: The research design respects local cultural norms and values. Questions are framed in a way that is culturally appropriate and sensitive to the social context of the participants.

Psychological Support: Acknowledging the potentially distressing nature of discussing sensitive topics, psychological support will be made available to participants who feel affected during or after the interviews.

Flexible Scheduling: Interviews will be scheduled at times that are convenient for the participants to ensure that their professional and personal responsibilities are not adversely impacted.

Data collection tools

For this study on the practices and challenges faced by social workers in Morocco's Integrated Care Units for Women and Children Victims of Violence, we employed semi-structured interviews as our primary data collection tool. These interviews were conducted using an interview guide, which was carefully crafted to ensure comprehensive coverage of topics relevant to the research objectives, such as experiences, strategies, and professional challenges.

Local languages

To address the language and ethical concerns, all interviews were conducted in the local languages predominantly spoken in the Fès-Meknès region, primarily Moroccan Arabic (Darija) and Tamazight. This approach ensures that participants can express themselves freely and accurately, enhancing the reliability of the data collected. The interviewers, who are fluent in these languages and culturally competent, were trained to use the guide effectively, ensuring consistency across interviews while allowing for the flexibility needed to explore topics that participants deemed important.

To further ensure ethical adherence, the interviews were recorded with participants' consent, and the data were transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were then translated into French or English for analysis, with careful attention to maintaining the integrity and nuances of the responses. This multilingual approach respects the linguistic diversity of the region and aligns with ethical research practices.

Research assistants

No, we will not use research assistants for this study, given the limited number of participants interviewed. Additionally, my own background as a social worker in the Fès-Meknès region has facilitated the task of conducting interviews. This direct approach ensures a more personal and accurate interaction with participants, which is crucial for addressing sensitive and complex topics. This method also allows for direct control over the quality of data collected and ensures adherence to ethical standards without the need for additional training for other assistants.

Dissemination of results

Findings should be accessible to participants, community, policy makers and other researchers. The dissemination of results from this study will be conducted through multiple channels to ensure accessibility to participants, the community, policymakers, and other researchers. Firstly, a summary of the findings will be provided to all participants and the local community leaders in Moroccan Arabic, the primary language spoken in the Fès-Meknès region. This will ensure that the results are understandable and accessible, reinforcing the community's engagement and the study's transparency.

Secondly, detailed results will be presented at local and national conferences and workshops targeting social workers, healthcare professionals, and policymakers. These presentations will also be conducted in Arabic to maximize understanding and impact. Additionally, the full study will be published in academic journals to reach a broader research audience. An executive summary in French and English, alongside translations into Arabic, will be made available to bridge the language gap between local and international stakeholders. Finally, to ensure ongoing engagement and impact, we will hold community forums and discussions in the regions where the research was conducted, providing a platform for feedback and further dialogue on implementing the recommendations.

Benefits of the research for community and participants

This research will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and challenges of social work in Morocco's Integrated Care Units for Women and Children Victims of Violence. The benefits include enhanced support strategies and improved care quality for victims, informed by direct feedback from social workers. The community will benefit from more effective and empathetic interventions tailored to local needs. Additionally, the findings will inform policy and operational enhancements, leading to broader societal impacts such as increased awareness and better resource allocation for addressing gender-based violence, ultimately contributing to safer and more supportive environments for victims.

Keeping data safe and confidential

In research, we anticipate that researchers will keep data confidential and destroy it when no longer needed. It is recommended to lock data in a drawer or password protected computer.

Data includes any paperwork (hard copy and soft copy) that has information provided by participants and can be linked to them.

To ensure data safety and confidentiality in this study, all physical paperwork will be securely stored in locked drawers, accessible only to the research team. Digital data will be protected with strong passwords and stored on encrypted devices. Access to all data will be strictly limited to authorized personnel. Additionally, sensitive information will be anonymized to prevent identification of participants. Once the research is complete and no longer needed for further analysis, all data will be securely destroyed according to the guidelines for ethical research practices, ensuring that participant confidentiality is maintained throughout and after the conclusion of the study.

Researchers from outside Africa

Important to ensure that you avoid potential exploitation, dumping of research ethics, power differentials, language and racial differences that may impact this research. As a researcher based in Morocco, Africa, I am deeply integrated into the local context, which significantly mitigates the risks of exploitation, ethical missteps, and issues arising from power differentials, language, and racial differences. Being a native participant in the cultural and social dynamics of the region, I bring an inherent understanding of and respect for local norms and ethics in research. My proximity to the community and firsthand experience with the societal nuances help ensure that the research is conducted in a manner that is both ethically sound and culturally sensitive. This local presence facilitates direct engagement and fosters trust, allowing for a more equitable and respectful approach to conducting research in the African context.

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Appendix 1

Application Form for African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) Advice

(Cite this part as Africa Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) (2022). Application Form for African Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) Advice. <https://africasocialwork.net/ethics-committee/>)

Background details

- a) Name of person making this application.
- b) Email address.
- c) Name, physical address, email address and country of main research institution in this application.
- d) Other institutions directly involved and their country
- e) When does your research start? (YYYY-MM-DD)
- f) What is the philosophical foundation of your ethics? What is your own statement of African Ubuntu ethics? How has it shaped your ethics plan?

1. Title of your research

2. Does your research include any of these groups of people? Select all that apply.

- Children
- People with a disability
- People who can't read language of the research
- People who have a mental illness
- Unemployed people or people with no or inadequate income
- People from strong spiritual backgrounds
- Elderly people
- People in rural communities
- Poor people (they self-define as poor or their community classify them as poor)
- Young women

3. Describe the gap, rationale and aim for this research?

4. Describe the permissions, consents and approvals required and how you will obtain them and from whom? If you already have these, describe what you have. Remember community and family permissions are an essential part of ethical research.

5. What will participants be asked to do or what actions will they take to fulfill the requirements of this research? How are you going to ensure that while they do this, they are not harmed, risked, distressed and burdened physically, culturally, socially, economically, psychologically or otherwise.

6. Describe your data collection tools fully and how researchers or their assistants will use them to collect information that you want from participants? Most communities in Africa use their local languages, it is unethical to research these communities in foreign languages. How are you going to address this?

7. Will you use research assistants? How will they be compensated? What processes are in place to ensure that they remain ethical? Is there training or manuals provided?

8. How are you going to disseminate results? How are you going to use local language? Remember findings should be accessible to participants, community, policy makers and other researchers.

9. What are the benefits of this research? How will community and participants benefit?

10. How will you keep data safe and confidential? We anticipate that researchers will keep data confidential and destroy it when no longer needed. It is recommended to lock data in a drawer or password protected computer. Data includes any paperwork (hard copy and soft copy) that has information provided by participants and can be linked to them.

11. If you are a researcher from outside Africa, what efforts have you made to ensure that you avoid potential exploitation, dumping of research ethics, power differentials, language and racial differences that may impact this research?

Appendix 2

Eight Basic Ubuntu Ethics in Research

(Cite this part as Africa Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) (2022). Eight Basic Ubuntu Ethics in Research. <https://africasocialwork.net/ethics-committee/>)

The eight basic Ubuntu ethics that we are concerned with in research are:

1. Value for Family (*unhuri*, familyhood)- families are an integral part of African society. While research usually focuses on individuals, these individuals must be viewed as part of families. A full and trusted story usually involves the family.
2. Respect for Community (*ujamaa*, 'communityhood')- research should promote African 'communityhood', uniting people and using local resources and compensating communities adequately. Local protocols should be respected, recognized and followed.
3. Decolonising – for years research languages, ethics, methods, philosophy, epistemology and ontologies have prioritized western knowledge. Present day research must prioritize African perspectives.
4. Developmental and capacity building research – funders and researchers, including African governments must be seen to be promoting growth of African research capacity. This means strengthening the work of African researchers and research institutions. Knowledge transfer is a key element when we assess externally driven research.
5. Sustainable research – research must build capacity of African researchers and African institutions to research on their own and not to be dependent on people from outside perpetually.
6. Justice – adequate recognition of co-researchers, communities, assistants contributors, facilitators and guides. Compensations should be just.
7. Value for life – every component of research must not result in harm, disease, impairment or loss of life.
8. Protection of most vulnerable populations – these include children, people with disability, people who are unable to read the language of the research, people with a mental illness, people with adequate income, people from strong spiritual backgrounds, elderly people, people in rural communities, young women and poor people.

Appendix 3

Writing a Research Ethics Statement

(Cite this part as Africa Independent Ethics Committee (AIEC) (2022). Writing a Research Ethics Statement. <https://africasocialwork.net/ethics-committee/>)

A research ethics statement is a detailed account of ethics that (1) will be followed when doing research (proposed or pre-research ethics statement) (2) was followed in research (post-research ethics statement). Statements must be written clearly, they must be appropriate or relevant and enough detail must be provided.

Pre-research ethics statement

It is written in the future tense to support a research proposal to a funder, research institution, other researchers, government, partners, community or ethics committee. At times, it is called an ethics plan, proposal or protocol.

Post-research ethics statement

It is written in the past tense to report research to publisher, journal, funder, research institution, other researchers, government, partners, community or ethics committee and in publications for readers. It is a story that shows how ethics were applied.

What to include in ethics statements?

The table below shows major questions writers, reviewers and editors should expect to be in an ethics statement and the items to include in an ethics statement.

| <i>Ethics question or statement</i> | <i>How to respond to this question</i> |
|---|--|
| What is your own ethics standpoint or philosophy? What philosophy are your ethics founded? | For Africa, our ethics are founded on Ubuntu philosophy. In responding to this question, refer to your experience of Ubuntu using first person language. Show the Ubuntu values that your family, community and society have, and how this shape how you do research. Do not be superficial or use colonial language, be yourself. |
| What is or was the gap or rationale or aim for this research? | Describe why this research is or was necessary. Describe benefit for the participants and larger community. Is or was there risk, did it over weigh doing the research? |
| What questions will you ask? | Provide the main questions from your data collection tools. |
| How are permissions, consents and approvals going to be obtained? | Describe step by step how you will reach or reached your participants or respondents. Describe local protocols that will be followed or were followed? Describe the consent and permission seeking process including those who consented and did not consent. Show evidence, for example, attach a permission letter. If you are a researcher from outside Africa, what efforts have you made to ensure that you avoid potential exploitation, dumping of research ethics, power differentials, language and racial differences that may impact this research? Provide evidence to show that the research process got approval from community leaders and ethics committee. Support letters from partners are also useful. |

- What will participants do or what did they do? How is or was harm, distress and burden managed?** Describe what participants are expected to do, step by step, or what they did. This includes how you collected data from them, the tools you. Identify risks and solutions. Describe how psychological, physical, economic or social harm, distress and burden are going to be avoided or how they were managed.
- How is data going to be collected?** What will the researcher do step by step?
- How is or was data kept safe and confidential?** It is important to protect the identity of researchers, show how this will be achieved or was achieved. This applies when engaging communities, collecting data, storing data and reporting.
- Avoiding ethics dumping in Africa** If you are a researcher from outside Africa, what efforts have you made to ensure that you avoid potential exploitation, dumping of research ethics, power differentials, language and racial differences that may impact this research?
- How accessible are the research findings and publications? Findings should be accessible to participants, community, policy makers and other researchers.** How will community or participants know about the results? How will they get access to the publications? Include issues like reporting back to the community through a meeting or workshop, publishing research in local publications, publish summary in local languages, publish results using graphics or audios that are easy to understand and sharing results with policy makers.
- What is your personal reflection of the ethics applied and your own view of ubuntu ethics? How does this apply to this research? How do these differ from Western ethics** End your ethics statement by giving personal views or reflections and restating your ubuntu ethical principles. Think about Western ethics and write those things that make them different and colonial, if there are similarities, point those out as well. Add recommendations for other researchers.