

Indigenous Research and Ethics

Prof. Dr. Muhammad Saleem¹



I am trying to make available an insightful overview of indigenous research and the ethical principles that underpin it. Indigenous research refers to a research paradigm and methodology rooted in the knowledge systems, worldviews, and values of Indigenous peoples. The key characteristics of indigenous research include cultural respect, community involvement, holistic approach, ethical framework, place-based focus, intergenerational and ancestral wisdom, decolonization, and local context. Indigenous research contributes to a more inclusive and diverse academic landscape, enabling the exploration of alternative perspectives and challenging dominant paradigms. Whereas, indigenous research ethics indeed differ from the Euro-Western paradigm, and they reflect a deep connection to place, community, and the broader environment. There are four key principles mentioned here in detail:

1. **Relational Accountability:** This principle emphasizes that research is not just a detached process, but it occurs within relationships between people and other entities, including nature, ancestors, and even ideas. Researchers are accountable to all these entities, and ethical conduct involves maintaining harmonious relationships with them.
2. **Communality of Knowledge:** This principle acknowledges that knowledge is widespread and not limited to academic experts. It recognizes that everyone, including animals, spirits, and ancestors, possesses valuable knowledge that contributes to research. Knowledge generated through research is seen as shared property, belonging to all.
3. **Reciprocity:** Reciprocity is about mutual exchange and relationships based on giving and receiving. This extends beyond human interactions to include relationships with the environment. Indigenous researchers emphasize the importance of taking only what is necessary from nature and giving back in the form of care and respect.
4. **Benefit Sharing:** This principle underscores the idea that research should benefit the participants and communities being studied, rather than solely benefiting the researchers. Indigenous researchers are committed to giving back to the communities they work with in ways that are meaningful and useful to them (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson & Wilson, 2013)

¹ Prof. Dr. Muhammad Saleem, Editor In-Chief, Pakistan Journal of Applied Psychology

These ethical principles provide a framework for conducting research that is respectful, holistic, and sustainable. They prioritize the interconnectedness of all beings and highlight the need for a harmonious relationship between researchers, participants, the land, and the wider cosmos. Indigenous research ethics serve as a reminder of the importance of cultural sensitivity, community engagement, and reciprocal relationships in research practices.

It's important to note that Indigenous research ethics are diverse and context-specific, as they can vary based on the cultural, geographical, and historical background of different Indigenous communities. Respecting and understanding this diversity is crucial when engaging with Indigenous research paradigms.

References

- Chilisa, B. (2012). Postcolonial indigenous research paradigms. *Indigenous research methodologies*, 98-127.
- Wilson, S., & Wilson, A. (2013). Noyo way in ik issi: A family practice of Indigenist research informed by land. In D. M. Mertens, F. Cram, & B. Chilisa (Eds.), *Indigenous pathways into social research: Voices of a new generation* (pp. 333–352). Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.