

MISCONDUCT IN RESEARCH



World Health
Organization

www.who.int/about/ethics

WHO defines research as the development of knowledge with the aim of understanding health challenges and mounting an improved response to them. This definition covers the full spectrum of activities WHO undertakes to support research.

A cornerstone of WHO's work, research activities, due to their sensitivity and visibility, may constitute a serious risk to the Organization if WHO's standards of scientific quality and ethical integrity are compromised.

Intentionally fraudulent research activities and poor practices can result in harmful consequences, not only on WHO's reputation but also on public health and trust in international organizations. It also has repercussions on science, whose impact is as difficult to estimate as it is to mitigate.

Recognizing the importance and sensitivity of research activities, the Policy on Misconduct in Research outlines the procedures for reporting (through the Integrity Hotline) and examining wrongdoing in research, as well as the measures to be taken in response.

Reporting wrongdoing in research is considered whistleblowing and the Policy on Whistleblowing and Protection against Retaliation applies.

WHAT IS WRONGDOING IN RESEARCH?

The non-adherence to the principles laid out in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Research is considered wrongdoing in WHO. Wrongdoing in research is treated in a manner commensurate with the seriousness of its potential implications on the health of the people the Organization serves, on public health, the environment, the credibility of WHO and the UN system, and the wider public's general trust in science.

The term wrongdoing means intentional, knowing or reckless fraudulent behaviour such as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, misrepresentation or other practices that deviate from the principles of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Research.

RESEARCH WRONGDOING SPECIFICALLY INCLUDES:

- Inappropriate development of research protocols.
- Failure to disclose or take action on declared conflict of interest.
- Inadequate management of a research project.
- Fabrication of data – deliberate creation, recording and reporting of nonexistent results.
- Falsification – deliberate manipulation of data to change, or omit data.
- Sabotage – intentionally damaging, destroying, obstructing or otherwise harming a research project.
- Plagiarism – the copying of ideas, data or text (or various combinations of the three) without authorization or acknowledgement.
- Piracy – the deliberate exploitation of data from others without authorization.
- Conducting research in a manner which contravenes the terms of approval granted by WHO or by other relevant bodies and accepted by WHO as governing the conduct of the research in question.
- Conducting research for which WHO requires prior approvals (for instance from national authorities) without having failed to secure those approvals.

- Failure to adhere to accepted ethical principles for the conduct of research, in particular the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki – Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects.
- Failure to follow accepted procedures or exercise due care for avoiding unreasonable risk of harm to humans, animals or the environment.
- Mismanagement or inadequate preservation of data and/or primary materials.
- Misappropriation of data.
- Improper conduct in peer review.
- Misrepresentation of interests, qualifications, and experience.
- Misrepresentation of involvement or authorship.
- Failure to protect or the inappropriate use or disclosure of confidential or proprietary information, or the misuse of intellectual property.
- Improper dealing with allegations of wrongdoing.

Wrongdoing in research does not include honest errors or differences in interpretations or judgements of data.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WRONGDOING AND POOR PRACTICE

This policy addresses research wrongdoing, as distinct from poor practice, which should also be reported through the Integrity Hotline in cases where there is a suspicion that it may cause serious damage to public health.

The distinction between the two is not always straightforward and the policy lays out an approach to clarify.

The policy does not address other types of wrongdoing that can emerge in the context of research in relation to the personal behavior of staff members and collaborators and that are covered by the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. Such types of wrongdoing are dealt with under other specific WHO policies, such as the Policy on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Prevention and Response, the policy on the Prevention of Harassment, and the policy on Fraud Prevention. All concerns can be reported through the Integrity Hotline.

WHO DOES THIS POLICY APPLY TO?

This policy applies to all WHO staff members involved in research. In its spirit and principles, it also applies to all WHO collaborators, any present or past staff member of the World Health Organization, or any individual involved in research supported by WHO.

REPORT SUSPECTED WRONGDOING

WHO considers that research wrongdoing, as defined above, implies a significant risk, i.e. is harmful to its interests, reputation, operations or governance. Individuals who report suspected wrongdoing in research in good faith are therefore considered “whistleblowers” and fall under the scope of the **Policy on Whistleblowing and Protection against Retaliation**.

WHO staff members and collaborators have a duty to report suspicions of wrongdoing. WHO staff and collaborators becoming aware of such violations of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Research are required to report their concerns to their supervisors, and in instances where this may be problematic, to contact the **Integrity Hotline**.

The Integrity Hotline is an independent service which takes in reports **confidentially** and when requested, **anonymously**.

EMAIL integrity@expolink.co.uk

WEBSITE wrs.expolink.co.uk/integrity

You can also raise your concerns confidentially and directly to ethicsoffice@who.int

www.who.int/about/ethics/integrity-hotline

PROCESS

Wrongdoing in research is handled by the Ethics team in the Office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics (CRE) and the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) who have established a joint two-tiered process of screening and examination to assess allegations.