

ETHICAL PROTOCOL IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: A STUDY OF QUALITATIVE DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS SUBMITTED TO UNIVERSITIES IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to explore the current practices of an application of ethical protocol in qualitative research conducted by Ph.D. candidates in Thailand. To guide the study three questions are posed: (1) has the researcher explicitly identified ethical issues in the research? (2) Is literature related to ethics reviewed and presented? (3) What ethical protocol are identified and applied? To answer these questions the concept and theories of ethics, research ethics, research protocol, ethical protocol, and the application of ethical protocol in qualitative dissertations are reviewed. Ten qualitative dissertations conducted by Ph.D. candidates from 2001-2010 in Thailand were selected for review and evaluation. Discussions, conclusions and recommendations were then made. The findings of this study reveal that major improvement is needed in the conduct of qualitative research in Thailand. It indicates that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the importance of ethics in conducting research especially in qualitative research. There is also a lack of knowledge and understanding of ethical issues, research ethics, research protocol, ethical protocol and how to apply them in qualitative research. To improve the current situation the following recommendations are made: (1) all research training courses should include research ethics; (2) university research courses should be revised to include research ethics; (3) research ethics awareness programs should be developed and implemented to create awareness of all research stakeholder groups; (4) promotion programs should be developed and implemented to encourage all universities in Thailand to establish their own IRB and practice IRB processes; (5) a piece of legislation on research on human beings should be enacted and enforced.

KEYWORDS : Qualitative Research, Ethics, Research Ethics, Research Protocol, Ethical Protocol, Qualitative Dissertation, Institutional Review Board

INTRODUCTION

This paper is adapted from the original study of "Ethical Protocol in Qualitative Research: A study of Qualitative Doctoral Dissertations Submitted to Universities in Thailand 2001-2010" (Joungtrakul, Sakulkoo, & Anantanond, 2011). It was argued that one of the major differences between quantitative and qualitative research (QR) is the relationship between the researcher and the research participants (Bryman, 1988; Joungtrakul, 2010). In general, quantitative research is usually conducted by following a positivism paradigm and applying survey strategy (Creswell, 2003, 2009). In order to obtain research data, a questionnaire is the major tool for data collection. In administering the questionnaires the most important aim of the researcher is to get as high as possible return rate of questionnaires without concern with who will be answering them. Questionnaires can be distributed to respondents by several means such as regular mail or email. In contrast, qualitative research is usually conducted following constructivism and other paradigms applying several research strategies such as phenomenology, grounded theory or case studies (Creswell, 2007). In order to obtain the required data an in-depth interview is the major data collection method. Thus the relationship between the researcher and the participants is very close to each other. A mutual trust among them must exist in order that a fruitful information exchange can be made during interviews. In many cases a familiarization study (Whiteley & Whiteley, 2005) is required so that the participants are comfortable and willing to disclose information. Data obtained through in-depth interviews contains both positive and negative information. Negative information can be dangerous to the participants in various ways if the researcher does not have an appropriate ethical measures or protocol to protect the participants. This leads to the issue of applying an ethical protocol

(EP) in QR.

As one of the most important functions of faculty members in addition to teaching both at the undergraduate and graduate levels is to conduct research and disseminate knowledge generated from such research they are expected to perform all their functions professionally and ethically. At the same time the Ph.D. student is considered a research trainee or apprentice and that the major purpose of a Ph.D. process is to produce faculty members and professional researchers (Phillips & Pugh, 1994). Thus, it is considered a development process of high level human resources (HR) for national development according to the National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDB, 2011).

It was argued that the final product of the process is the Ph.D. dissertation where the apprenticeship ends when the candidate has successfully completed the dissertation (Joungtrakul, 2007; Phillips & Pugh, 1994). At the same time the dissertation must demonstrate "authority in the candidate's field and shows evidence of command of knowledge in relevant fields" (The University of Melbourne, 2009-2010, cited in Joungtrakul, 2010, p. 460). It shows that "the candidate has a thorough grasp of the appropriate methodological techniques and an awareness of their limitations" (p. 461). So, a Ph.D. must be an authority in both subject matter in the field of study and the research methodology which includes the application of ethical principles in the conduct of research. Thus, it is interesting to find out in practice how ethical protocol is applied by Ph.D. candidates in conducting research for their dissertations.

This paper aims to understand the current practices of the application of EP in qualitative research conducted by Ph.D. candidates in Thailand. To guide the study three questions are posed: (1) has the researcher explicitly identified ethical issues in the research? (2) Is literature

related to ethics reviewed and presented? (3) What ethical protocols are identified and applied? To answer these questions the concept and theories of ethics, research ethics, research protocol, EP, and the application of EP in qualitative research dissertations are reviewed. Ten QR dissertations conducted by Ph.D. candidates from 2001-2010 in Thailand were selected for review and evaluation. Discussions, conclusions and recommendations were then made. The limitation of the study follows.

THE CONCEPT AND THEORIES OF ETHICS

According to Steiner & Steiner (1994) ethics can be defined as "the study of what is good and bad, right and wrong, and just and unjust" (p.178). It is the "discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation. Ethics can also be regarded as a set of moral principles or values. Morality is a doctrine or system of moral conduct referring to that which relates to principles of right and wrong in behaviour" (Carroll, 1993, p. 92). It "concerns the morality of human conduct" (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, p. 14). In relation to research it refers to "the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process" (p. 14).

Miles & Huberman, (1994, p. 289) assert that "specific ethical issues are, explicitly or not, nested in larger theories of how we decide that an action is right, correct, or appropriate." Deyhle, Hess, & Lecompte (1992, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994) suggest five general theories: (1) a teleological theory "judges actions according to primary ends, good in themselves" (p. 289); (2) a utilitarian, pragmatic approach "judges actions according to their specific consequences---benefits and costs---for various audiences" (p. 289); (3) a deontological view "invokes one or more universal rules (e.g., Kant's categorical and practical imperatives, which boil down

to: (a) Would I like this action to be applied to everyone---including me?, and (b) Will I treat every person I encounter as an end and not as a means to something I want?" (p. 289); (4) a critical theory approach judges actions according to whether one provides direct benefits to those involved and/or becomes an advocate for them; (5) a conventional view "judges actions according to whether they are congruent with specific agreements made with others in trusted relationships" (p. 289). Kvale (1996) provides three ethical models: (1) the duty ethics of principles or a deontological model; (2) the utilitarian ethics of consequences model; and (3) a virtue ethics of skills model. In the first model research is "driven by universal principles such as honesty, justice and respect. Actions are governed by principles that should not be broken, and judged by intent rather than consequences" (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, p. 20). In the second model "the rightness or wrongness of actions are judged by their consequences rather than their intent is underlain by a universalist cost-benefit result pragmatism" (p. 20). The third model stresses a contextual or situational ethical position, with an emphasis on the researchers' moral values and ethical skills in reflexively negotiating ethical dilemmas (p. 20). In addition, a feminist care-based ethical model was put forward with an emphasis on care and responsibility rather than outcomes, justice or rights. This is a "model that is focused on particular feminist-informed social values" (Edwards & Mauthner, 2002, pp. 20-21).

Theories can be presented in the form of core principles to guide ethical choice (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects in Biomedical and Behavioral Research has identified ethical principles and scientific norms that should govern human research (Sieber, 1992). The following three ethical principles must guide human research:

(1) Beneficence-maximizing good outcomes for science, humanity and the individual research participants while avoiding or minimizing unnecessary risk, harm, or wrong; (2) Respect-protecting the autonomy of (autonomous) persons, with courtesy and respect for individuals as persons, including those who are not autonomous (e.g., infants, the mentally retarded, senile persons); (3) Justice-ensuring reasonable, nonexploitative, and carefully considered procedures and their fair administration: fair distribution of costs and benefits among persons and groups (i.e., those who bear the risks of research should be those who benefit from it) (Sieber, 1992).

These three basic ethical principles are translated into six norms of scientific behavior as follows: (1) a valid research design: Only valid research yields correct results. Valid design takes account of relevant theories, methods, and prior findings; (2) Competence of the researcher: The investigator must be capable of carrying out the procedures validly; (3) Identification of consequences: An assessment of risks and benefits should be identified from relevant perspectives. Ethical research will adjust procedures to respect to privacy, ensure confidentiality, maximize benefit, and minimize risk; (4) Selection of subjects: The subjects must be appropriate to the purpose of the study, representative of the population that is to benefit from the research, and appropriate in number; (5) Voluntary informed consent: Voluntary informed consent of subjects should be obtained beforehand. Voluntary means freely, without threat or undue inducement. Informed means that the subject knows what a reasonable person in the same situation would want to know before giving consent. Consent means explicit agreement to participate. Informed consent requires clear communication that subjects comprehend, not complex technical explanations or legal jargon; and (6) Compensation for injury: The researcher is responsible for what happens to

subjects. In the USA, Federal law requires that subjects be informed whether harm will be compensated, but does not require compensation (Sieber, 1992).

RESEARCH ETHICS

It was argued that "research ethics deals primarily with the interaction between researchers and the people they study" (Family Health International, undated, p. 8). However, Sieber (1992) asserts that "the ethical researcher creates a mutually respectful, win-win relationship in which subjects are pleased to participate candidly, and the community at large regards the conclusions as constructive. Public policy implications of the research are presented in such a way that public sensibilities are unlikely to be offended and backlash is unlikely to occur" (p. 3). Whiteley (2002) asserts that "ethical behavior is at the heart of all research. One of the biggest challenges is the fact that a large part of ethics is undetectable. The researcher's own integrity is the arbitrator of ethical behavior, especially as field work is transitory and elusive" (p.26). Since "ethics basically refers to issues of right, wrong, fairness, and justice..." (Carroll, 1993, p. 22), it is "the systematic study of value concepts... 'good,' 'bad,' 'right,' 'wrong...and the general principles that justify applying these concepts" (Sieber, 1992, p. 3). It is about "questions of values, that is, of beliefs, judgments, and personal viewpoints" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p.44). Thus research ethics is a question of responsibility. It involves decision making and responsibility including the social and moral obligations of the researcher (House, 1990; Punch, 1998; Smith, 1990). According to Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) the responsibilities include: "The responsibilities relate to the individual researcher, the participants in the research, professional colleagues and the teaching community and toward the sponsors of the research. In this sense, the ethics of research concern the criteria

which, on being met, enable the researcher to do right and correct research and which facilitate the adequate discharge of the kinds of responsibilities outlined above" (p. 44).

Berg (1998) argued that "social scientists, perhaps to a greater extent than the average citizen have an ethical obligation to their colleagues, their study population, and the larger society" (p. 31). It was argued that "the reason for this is that social scientists delve into the social lives of other human beings. From such excursions into private social lives, various policies, practices, and even laws may result. Thus, (all) researchers must ensure the rights, privacy, and welfare of the people and communities that form the focus of their studies" (p.31). Marshall & Rossman (1999) confirm that "the qualities that make a successful qualitative researcher are revealed through an exquisite sensitivity to the ethical issues present when we engage in any moral act" (p.90).

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

The research protocol is "an official account of the intended research methods and procedures, with special attention to how benefit is maximized and risk minimized, autonomy of subjects is respected, and fairness to subjects is ensured" (Sieber, 1992, p. 14). It discusses briefly the methods, and the researcher's background, clarifying what is to be done, how and why (Sieber, 1992). Some other elements of protocol include: (1) subject selection, recruitment, and justification for the number and kind of subjects proposed; (2) benefits to subjects and others; (3) risks and how these will be minimized, including risks to privacy and confidentiality; (4) informed consent; (5) obtaining permission of a parent or guardian, and subjects' assent, when subjects are minors (Sieber, 1992). According to Sieber, (1992, p. 15) "the protocol might consist of a one-page statement and a consent form,

if the project is simple and involves little risk. Or it might be considerably longer." In the USA, the protocol is prepared by the researcher and submitted to the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) for review and approval. In 1974 the federal government mandated the establishment of IRB at all universities that accept funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (Sieber, 1992). The role of the IRB is to "examine all proposals for research involving human subjects to determine whether the rights and welfare of the subjects are adequately protected" (p. 4). Details procedures for developing a research protocol can be found in Sieber (1992).

In addition to the IRB professional code of ethics is one of the measures applying for in conducting ethical research. Berg (1998) argues that "during the past several decades, changing social attitudes about research as well as changing legislation have led professional associations to create codes of ethical conduct" (p.44). In addition "as a condition of funding, government agencies in various countries have insisted that review and monitoring bodies be established by institutions engaged in research involving human subjects" (Christians, 2000, p.140). Miles & Huberman (1994) argue that most professions have "well-defined codes of ethics" (p. 288). According to Steiner & Steiner (1994) "professional people have strongly internalized ethical codes that guide their action...it holds that you should do only that which can be explained before a committee of your peers (p. 225). It applies to "doctors, engineers, architects, college professors, (researchers,) and...in resolving the special problems of their professions and fields of interest" (p. 225).

It was argued that "professional ethics deals with additional issues such as collaborative relationships among researchers, mentoring relationships, intellectual

property, fabrication of data, and plagiarism, among others" (Family Health International, undated, p. 8). Christians (2000) argues that each of the major scholarly associations had "adopted its own code" (p. 138) for examples American Sociological Association (ASA, 1999). Christians (2000) asserts that most of the code adopted is "with an overlapping emphasis on four guidelines for directing an inductive science of means toward majoritarian ends" (p.138). These include: informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. A detailed discussion of informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality can be found in (Sieber, 1992) and a discussion of accuracy can be found in Christians (2000).

ETHICAL PROTOCOL

Based on the definition of research protocol, ethical protocol in this study refers to ethical measures that the researcher use to ensure that the rights, anonymity and privacy, and welfare of participants, the people and communities that form the focus of the studies are protected and promoted. They should be protected from being harmed and not being deceived and that their informed consent is secured (Punch, 1998). It includes the four basic EP asserted by Christians (2000): informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. These EP will be used as a basis for review and evaluation of QR Ph.D. dissertation to be presented in the next section.

EP is usually explicitly presented in a separate section of the research proposal and the text of the final report. A literature related to research ethics is presented followed with an identification of specific EP to be used in the research along with the rationale justifying why the researcher selected such an EP to be applied in the research. For example, Buoy (2002)

presents EP section on privacy and confidentiality in her dissertation as follows:

As no employees have been referred to by name or position within the body of the research document, both privacy and confidentiality have been maintained. All tape recordings, transcripts and traceable documents have been withheld from the case study organizations. The returning of documentation to any respondents has been conducted on a hand delivery basis or electronically with clearance and approval to do so prior to transmission. The outcome of the research is presented in a format that does not indicate origin of the data (although every line is traceable by the researcher back to its original source). It thus does not violate the confidentiality agreements discussed at the commencement of every interview (p. 113).

Further discussions and examples of EP application in QR can be found in Joungtrakul (2009) and Siriwaiprapan (2000).

EP APPLICATION IN QR DISSERTATIONS CONDUCTED IN THAILAND

Ten QR dissertations conducted by Ph.D. candidates in Thailand during 2001-2010 were selected based on the purposive and convenience techniques for review and evaluation. The data and information reviewed and evaluated is mostly based on the methodological and analytical parts of the studies. A summary of each study is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: EP application in QR dissertations conducted in Thailand

Case	Ethical Issues Identified	Ethical Literature Presented	Ethical Protocol Applied	Remarks
Case 1	No	No	No	Indicated position of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant in the text of data analysis chapter. Interview schedule containing positions and organizations of all participants and resume of each participant are also provided in appendices
Case 2	No	No	Pseudonyms were used to avoid the impact of the results of the research on the participants	Provided list of names of focus group members and seminar participants
Case 3	No	No	No	Provided a list of name, position and organization of participants in the text of methodological chapter. Also provided the lists of name, position, and organization of each participant in appendices. Pictures of researcher conducting interview of participants and focus group interviews are displayed in appendix
Case 4	No	No	No	Makes no mention about ethics in the study
Case 5	No	No	No	Provided a list of names of participants in the text of methodological chapter and resume including details characters and part of the interview data of each participant in appendix of the study
Case 6	No	No	No	Indicated the name of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts and provided a list of name, position and organization of all participants in appendix. Pictures of researcher conducting interview of participants and other activities of the study are displayed in appendix.
Case 7	Yes	No	General statement was used instead of specific ethical protocol	Provides list of names and addresses of participants and pictures of interviews and other activities in the appendix of the report
Case 8	No	No	No	Provided a list of names of participants in the text of methodological chapter. Resume of each participant and participants of brain storming sessions are also provided in appendix
Case 9	No	No	No	Indicates the name and position of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participants
Case 10	No	No	No	Provides position indicating the organization of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant

Source: Joungtrakul, Sakulkoo, et al., (2011).

As shown in Table 1, there is only one (Case 7) out of ten QR dissertations reviewed indicated EP in the report of study. The EP section in this study states that the researcher has thoroughly considered and was careful in collecting data by taking into account the rights and affects that might arise from this research by giving importance to the feeling and opinions of the participants along with the facts obtained. However, no ethical literature and justification for selection of EP were presented. In addition the researcher has displayed the names and addresses of all participants explicitly in the appendix. Pictures of the researcher and the participant during the interview, the focus groups and other activities of this research were also displayed explicitly in the appendix of the study.

One study (Case 2) did not specify ethical issue and literature in the report but provided an EP by using the pseudonyms instead of the real names to avoid the impact of research results on the participants. However, the researcher provides the list of names and addresses of all participants of the group discussions and focus group including the public hearing conferences conducted in this study. One study (Case 9) indicates the names and positions of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant in the text of the data analysis chapter.

One study (Case 1) indicated the positions of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant in the text of data analysis chapter. The researcher also provided an interview schedule containing positions and organizations of all participants in Appendix A and a resume of each participant in Appendix B. One study (Case 8) provided a list of names of participants in the text of the methodological chapter. The researcher also provided a resume of each participant and the participants of

brain storming sessions conducted in this study.

One study (Case 3) provided a list of names, positions and organizations of participants in the text of the methodological chapter. The researcher also provided the lists of names, positions, and organizations of each participant in Appendix G and H of the study. Pictures of the researcher conducting interviews with participants and focus group interviews are displayed in Appendix I of this study. One study (Case 5) provided a list of names of participants in the text of the methodological chapter. The researcher also provided resumes and details of characters and part of the interview data of each participant in Appendix A of this study.

One study (Case 6) indicated the names of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant in the text of data analysis chapters. The researcher also provided a list of names, positions and organizations of all participants in Appendix C. Photographs of the researcher conducting interviews of participants and other activities of the study are displayed in Appendix F of this study. One study (Case 10) provides positions indicating the organizations of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant in the text of data analysis and discussions chapter. One study (Case 4) makes no mention about ethics in the study.

DISCUSSIONS

The discussion of the findings in this study first will be made by corresponding to the three questions posed. Having replied to the three questions a general discussion will then follow.

In replying to the first question of: Has the researcher explicitly identified ethical issues in the research? It was found that from ten QR dissertations reviewed, there is only one study which presented

ethical issues without identifying specific EP. However, the list of names and addresses of participants and photographs of interviews and other activities are explicitly presented in the appendix of the report. This severely violates the code of ethics on privacy and confidentiality (Bell & Nutt, 2002; Punch, 1998; Sieber, 1992).

In replying to the second question of: Is literature related to ethics reviewed and presented? It was found that none of the ten QR dissertation reviewed present literature review related to ethics. The incident indicated that the objective of the process of the Ph.D. to produce professional researchers is not being met as all of the dissertations reviewed failed to comply with principles of research ethics. All dissertations reviewed severely violated the professional code of ethics. Ethics is an indispensable component of professional (Bowie, 1991) and that "the chief function of a professional is...to use her specialized knowledge to protect ignorant clients from being exploited by others" (p. 19).

In replying to the third question of: What ethical protocol are identified and applied? It was found that although no specific ethical issue was identified, one study did provide an EP to protect the participants. However, the list of names of focus group members and seminar participants were explicitly presented in the appendix of the report. This is not only against the intention of the researchers to protect the participants as stated but it also strongly violates the code of ethics on privacy and confidentiality (Bell & Nutt, 2002; Punch, 1998; Sieber, 1992).

It is clearly an incidence in this study that most of the QR dissertations reviewed failed to comply with EP and the principles of research ethics. Many studies indicated the names and positions of the participants with direct quotations from the interview transcripts. Some studies presented the resume of each participant

while many studies presented photographs of the researcher conducting interviews with participants. The photographs of other research activities are also explicitly displayed. This severely violates the code of ethics on privacy and confidentiality (Bell & Nutt, 2002; Punch, 1998; Sieber, 1992). By doing this the reader can trace the participants easily (Buoy, 2002) and they are not protected according to the principles of research ethics (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002; Robley, 1995; Sieber, 1992). One study did not mention about ethics at all. It is interesting to note that none of the studies present ethical literature.

The above findings of this study reveal a very serious ethical issue in conducting QR in Thailand. It was argued that the major objective of the Ph.D. process is to produce professional researchers. It is the comprehensive training in which its final product is a Ph.D. dissertation (Phillips & Pugh, 1994). Thus the Ph.D. must be an authority of both methodology and subject matter of the dissertation (IUBMB, 2006; Phillips & Pugh, 1994). Since ethics is one of the most important components of any profession (Bowie, 1991) they must have thorough knowledge of ethics and EP and be able to apply them in conducting research properly. In addition, one of the functions of the Ph.D. is to learn to teach, it is very important that they teach especially the teaching of research properly both in terms of subject matter content and methodology. If they did not understand and did not realize the importance of ethics in research it will be very difficult to expect them to teach ethics and the application of EP in research. They will teach what they have learnt and would believe that what they have learnt and done in their dissertations are proper practices. This may lead to unethical conduct of these researchers unintentionally. It will be very dangerous to society as this would be like a virus that can be spread very rapidly to the community.

This is a very serious problem that needs immediate resolution. As Shaw (2003) states "naivety about ethics is itself unethical" (p. 11).

One of the major causes of this situation might be that we are concentrating on teaching quantitative research in Thailand (Joungtrakul, 2010; Joungtrakul, 2007; Joungtrakul, Aticomsuwan, & Someran, 2011). As discussed earlier although ethics is important to all kinds of research but due to its nature, qualitative research is more sensitive to ethical dilemma. At present there is no law requiring a research proposal to be vetted by an ethical institution before the conduct of research. However, a bill of "Research on Humans" was drafted and proposed by the Forum for Ethics Committees in Thailand (2007), however, since 2007 no further progress has been made. Although some universities such as Buarapha and Mahidol have established their own IRB many other universities have not done this. A professional code of ethics is produced by the National Research Council, Office of the National Research Board (1998) and the Forum for Ethics Committees in Thailand (2007) but no sanction is currently exercised in practice. The Association of Researchers plays a key role in research training but research ethics is not emphasized. Joungtrakul (2010) points out ten stakeholder groups of QR in Thailand requiring more knowledge and understanding of QR and research ethics. They are: (1) educational institutions who design curriculum and produce professional researchers; (2) faculty members who teach research; (3) supervisors who supervise theses and dissertations; (4) students who are conducting research for their theses or dissertations; (5) professional researchers who conduct research for their clients; (6) funding organizations who support research projects; (7) experts or peers who review research papers or reports; (8) users of research; (9) the research community; and (10) the general public. Awareness

of all stakeholder groups of the importance of ethics in research especially in QR would help improve the current situation and that ethics should be included in all phases of research from the beginning of identifying the needs for research to the end of the research process. As Punch (1998) states "morals in research are too important to be left to moralists" (p. 37, cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 296).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reveal that major improvement is needed in the conduct of QR in Thailand. It indicates that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the importance of ethics in conducting research especially in QR. There is also a lack of knowledge and understanding of ethical issues, research ethics, research protocol, EP and how to apply them.

To improve the current situation the following recommendations are made: (1) all research training courses should include research ethics; (2) university research courses should be revised to include research ethics; (3) research ethics awareness programs should be developed and implemented to create awareness of all research stakeholder groups; (4) promotion programs should be developed and implemented to encourage all universities in Thailand to establish their own IRB and practice the IRB processes; (5) a piece of legislation on research on human should be enacted and enforced.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Although this study indicates some critical issues in research ethics in Thailand there are some limitations of the study. This study reviewed ten QR studies conducted by Ph.D. candidates in Thailand during 2001-2010. These studies were selected based on the purposive and convenience techniques. It cannot be claimed

that these studies represent all QR dissertations conducted in Thailand. In addition the ten studies selected are written in Thai language. Those dissertations submitted by Ph.D. candidates in English or in international programs are not included. In addition the data and information reviewed and evaluated is mostly based on the methodological and analytical parts of the studies. A more rigorous study should be conducted for generalization purposes.

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