

ISI Professional Code of Ethics

Kiev, June 2010

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Purpose and context

- informative and descriptive rather than authoritarian or prescriptive
- applicable as far as possible to different areas of statistical methodology and application
- neither the principles nor the commentaries are concerned with general written or unwritten rules or norms such as compliance with the law
- the text is divided into four sections, each of which contains principles or sets of principles followed by short commentaries on the conflicts and difficulties inherent in their operation
- conflicts of obligations may occur



Overview

1. Obligations to society
2. Obligations to funders and employers
3. Obligations to colleagues
4. Obligations to subjects

1.1 Considering conflicting interests

- greater access to well-grounded information is beneficial to society.
- statistical information can be misconstrued or misused,
- its impact can be different on different groups
- the statistician should consider the likely consequences of collecting and disseminating various types of data and should guard against predictable misinterpretations or misuse.
- the statistician has to be sensitive to the possible consequences of his or her work

1.2 Widening the scope of statistics

- Statisticians should use the possibilities open to them to extend the scope of statistical inquiry, and to communicate their findings, for the benefit of the widest possible community.

1.3 Pursuing objectivity

- While statisticians operate within the value systems of their societies, they should attempt to uphold their professional integrity without fear or favour.
- Science can never be entirely objective, and statistics is no exception. The selection of topics for attention may reflect a systematic bias in favour of certain cultural or personal values.

2. Obligations to funders and employers

2.1 Clarifying obligations and roles

- Statisticians should clarify in advance the respective obligations of employer or funder and statistician

2.2 Assessing alternatives impartially

- Statisticians should consider the available methods and procedures for addressing a proposed inquiry and should provide the funder or employer with an impartial assessment of the respective merits and demerits of alternatives.

2.3 Not pre-empting outcomes

- Statisticians should not accept contractual conditions that are contingent upon a particular outcome from a proposed statistical inquiry.

2.4 Guarding privileged information

- Statisticians are frequently furnished with information by the funder or employer who may legitimately require it to be kept confidential. Statistical methods and procedures that have been utilised to produce published data should not, however, be kept confidential.

3. Obligations to colleagues

3.1 Maintaining confidence in statistics

- Statisticians depend upon the confidence of the public. They should in their work attempt to promote and preserve such confidence without exaggerating the accuracy or explanatory power of their data.

3.2 Exposing and reviewing methods and findings

- Within the limits of confidentiality requirements, statisticians should provide adequate information to colleagues to permit their methods, procedures, techniques and findings to be assessed. Such assessments should be directed at the methods themselves rather than at the individuals who selected or used them.

3.3 Communicating ethical principles

- To conduct certain inquiries statisticians need to collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines, as well as with interviewers, clerical staff, students, etc.
- A principle of all scientific work is that it should be open to scrutiny, assessment and possible validation by fellow scientists.

4. Obligations to subjects

4.1 Avoiding undue intrusion

- Statisticians should be aware of the intrusive potential of some of their work. They have no special entitlement to study all phenomena.
- Some forms of statistical inquiry appear to be more intrusive than others.

4.2 Obtaining informed consent

- Statistical inquiries involving the active participation of human subjects should be based as far as practicable on their freely given informed consent. Even if participation is required by law, it should still be as informed as possible

4.2 Continued

An assessment needs to be made of which items of information are likely to be material to a subject's willingness to participate:

- (i) purpose of study, policy implications, etc.;
- (ii) identity of funder(s);
- (iii) anticipated uses of the data, form of publication, etc.;
- (iv) identity of interviewer/experimenter and organisational base;
- (v) method by which subject has been chosen (sampling frame, etc.);
- (vi) subject's role in study;
- (vii) possible harm or discomfort to subject;
- (viii) degree of anonymity and confidentiality;
- (ix) proposed data storage arrangements, degree of security, etc.;
- (x) procedures of study (time involved for participant, etc.);
- (xi) whether participation is voluntary or compulsory



4.3 Modifications to informed consent

On occasions, technical or practical considerations inhibit the achievement of prior informed consent. In these cases, the subjects' interests should be safeguarded in other ways

4.4 Protecting the interests of subjects

Neither consent from subjects nor the legal requirement to participate absolves the statistician from an obligation to protect the subject as far as possible against potentially harmful effects of participating. The statistician should try to minimise disturbance both to subjects themselves and to the subjects' relationships with their environment.

4.5 Maintaining confidentiality of records

Statistical data are unconcerned with individual identities. They are collected to answer questions such as 'how many?' or 'what proportion?', not 'who?'. The identities and records of co-operating (or non-cooperating) subjects should therefore be kept confidential, whether or not confidentiality has been explicitly pledged.

4.6 Inhibiting disclosure of identities

Statisticians should take appropriate measures to prevent their data from being published or otherwise released in a form that would allow any subject's identity to be disclosed or inferred.

Links

- <http://isi.cbs.nl/ethics.htm>
- <http://isi.cbs.nl/ethics2.htm>