

Policy on Scientific Integrity in the Conduct of Research

National Public Health Institute of Liberia



~ Preventing and Controlling Public Health Threats~

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Forward

It seems like a no-brainer to find reasons why research is important, but many people avoid it like the spate. However, conducting research is not only necessary for those who like to learn, whether they are members of a research institution or not, it is crucial. The main purposes of research are to inform action, gather evidence for theories, and contribute to developing knowledge in a field of study.

The research agenda of NPHIL is a means of raising the skills and knowledge among young scientists by becoming more attractive in the health sector at all levels. The main intention is to increase the individual and collective capacity of researchers so as to support evidence-based research capacity and learning. Although international researchers have over the years partnered with our staff to conduct research; but, the development of a research agenda for the institute will guide future researchers and potential partners in conducting research that will benefit Liberia and the world.

I understand the value that research should be governed by a wide range of principled, ethical, lawful, skilled practices and canons. This policy document calls for researchers, their corresponding institutions, and all other bodies involved in promoting or carrying out research to be heedful of ethical practice, including but not limited to employers, funders, and institutions granting research permissions.

I therefore call on all institutions, national and international partners and stakeholders involved in conducting or facilitating research to comply with the ethical requirements recommended in this policy document.

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Section 1: Introduction

The National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health has the responsibility to expand, conduct, and coordinate public health and medical research to inform Liberian Public Health Policies. This requires conducting applied and basic research across divisions of the institution and with external partners, thereby creating the required evidence base to inform health related policies of the Liberian government. NPHIL is also responsible for identifying priority areas of research and shaping the conduct of research, ensuring that both locally and externally led public health and medical research align to the country's priorities.

For the purposes of promoting a culture that upholds scientific integrity in the design, conduct, management, review and dissemination of research findings; and to ensure the quality, accuracy, and transparency of scientific information used in decision-making, NPHIL has developed a policy on Scientific Integrity in the Conduct of Research. This policy is a set of principles and practices for professional behavior that governs all researchers and research affiliates of the National Public Health Institute of Liberia.

The leadership of NPHIL strongly upholds the international principle that the: *“free, and responsible practice of science is fundamental to scientific advancement of human and environmental well-being.”* As a member of the scientific family, NPHIL also seeks to foster and support a secure and professional environment to conduct research and communicate findings with integrity, respect, equity, reliability, and transparency to the scientific community and members of the public always.

Section 2: Objectives of the policy

General objective:

Maintain the culture of scientific integrity in the design, conduct, and communication of research findings.

Specific objectives:

- a. Increase public trust in the credibility and reliability of NPHIL led and partnered research and scientific activities.
- b. Uphold the quality, accuracy, and transparency of scientific information used in decision-making
- c. Ensure that allegations of breach of the principles of scientific integrity are handled fairly, impartially and appropriately.
- d. Ensure scientists involved in the design, conduct, management, review or communication of research or related activities understand and conduct themselves in manner consistent with the principles of scientific integrity.

Section 3: Core Principles guiding the conduct of research at NPHIL

- a. Scientific excellence, research ethics, and responsible research conduct
- b. High quality, probity and honesty in all aspects of research
- c. Personal accountability and liability in the conduct of research and the publication of results
- d. Upholding the principles of good clinical practice in the conduct of research involving human subjects
- e. Freedom of research and science from political, commercial, client and stakeholder interference
- f. Professionalism and civility in working with others
- g. Legal conformity in all aspects of research, including intellectual property
- h. All research work that are being done in collaboration with local & international institutions and partners shall be preceded by a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
- i. Benevolence in assessing the implications of research on humans and animals
- j. Dissemination of research and scientific results/information to the public in a timely and accurate manner
- k. Notification of any breaches of these principles to senior management of NPHIL

Section 4: Key responsibilities of scientists/researchers/affiliates

All NPHIL Scientists/Researchers/affiliates are expected to:

- a. Act with sincerity in the interest of advancing research and science, and also fully assume responsibility for the integrity of their research
- b. Treat others with courtesy, equity, and fairness in the conduct of research
- c. Remain cognizant of and strictly abide by laws/regulations guiding professional conduct of research
- d. Maintain detailed, authentic and accurate records of research to allow substantiation and replication of their work by others
- e. Disseminate data and study results promptly and accurately
- f. Respect the intellectual property rights of others adhering to best practices for data management, accessibility, and preservation
- g. Assume responsibility for the authenticity of their contributions to all publications, reports and applications for funding support
- h. Grant authorship only to individuals who have **contributed** to a study during its conduct or manuscript development as indicated in the authorship policy
- i. Acknowledge individuals and institutions with significant contributions and roles to the research work
- j. Conform to NPHIL's Scientific Integrity Policy and impartially, promptly, thoroughly in a timely manner evaluate research works of others when given such responsibility
- k. Tolerate constructive criticism and be receptive to peer review
- l. Disclose any financial, personal, professional interest that could lead to conflicts of interest
- m. Desist from misconducts such as dishonesty, misrepresentation, coercive manipulation or other actions that bring into question the authenticity of research associated activities including the planning, conduct, reporting, or communication of research findings
- n. As a matter of ethical obligation, compare the societal benefits of their research vis-a-vis the risks to human and animal wellbeing or other potential impacts on the environment.

Section 5: Breaches in Scientific Integrity

- a. The term “breaches in scientific integrity” used in this Policy refers to violations of the core principles guiding the conduct of research at NPHIL as stated earlier in this document. This refers to formal definitions of research misconduct to include:
 - Fabrication: making up/creating data or results and recording or reporting them.
 - Falsification: manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
 - Plagiarism: the appropriation of another person’s ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.
- b. A finding of scientific misconduct related to fabrication, falsification or plagiarism requires that:
 - There is a deviation from accepted practices of the relevant research community
 - The misconduct is committed intentionally, or knowingly or recklessly
 - The allegation must be proven by a preponderance of evidence.

Section 6: Investigating Breaches of scientific integrity

- a. All issues of breaches in scientific integrity shall be investigated by the **scientific research integrity committee** at NPHIL. This will be an **ad hoc committee** constituted by **senior leadership**.
- b. Whenever cases of alleged breaches of scientific integrity are reported, the integrity committee shall endeavor to resolve the issue fairly, respectfully and professionally.
- c. The scientific integrity committee will ensure the protection of personal information of individuals bringing forward allegations of breach of scientific integrity without consequences or fear of recrimination.

Section 7: Penalties for Breaches in scientific research integrity

The scientific research integrity committee at NPHIL will decide the punitive action to be taken, if a breach of scientific integrity has been established. These sanctions may include but are not limited to the following:

- Written letter of warning
- Suspension of researcher from role on project and or NPHIL
- Dismissal of researcher from role with NPHIL
- Publication of "errata" notices
- Withdrawal/retraction of presentations, publication, or posters

References

1. Values and Ethics Code for the Public Sector: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=25049>

2. Directive on the Management of Communications: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=30682>
3. Policy on Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=25178>
4. Policy on Learning, Training and Development: <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=12405>
5. Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act: <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-31.9/>
6. <https://www.agu.org/-/media/Files/AGU-Scientific-Integrity-and-Professional-Ethics-Policy.pdf>
7. Include generic MOU template
8. Guidelines that governs national and international research