Principles of Ethical Métis Research

Research comes with an inherent responsibility. It is important that researchers adhere to and apply a high level of scientific and ethical standards. This ensures the protection of both the research participants and the researcher.

Métis have different experiences of research than First Nations or Inuit, but there is very little information on research ethics specific to Métis. The concept of Métis-specific health research, practiced in a way where Métis people are consulted and involved in the research, has really only emerged in the last two decades. There is little evidence or documentation around the use of Métis-specific research ethical guidelines or principles. Métis-specific means that the focus of an activity or program is on Métis communities, and is consistent with the needs and unique cultural perspective of Métis.

Research Ethics in a Métis Context

In March of 2010, the Métis Centre hosted a Think Tank on Métis specific research ethics and brought together a number of experienced Métis researchers, students, and Métis organizations to begin a dialogue about research ethics. The Métis Centre engaged this diverse group from across Canada in a discussion about Métis-specific culturally competent ethical research principles. Through this discussion, we established a standard that the Métis Centre will adhere to in its research, and that other groups may choose to use to conduct research that has an impact on the lives of Métis people.

These principles are intended to reflect the considerable experience of the participants involved. Outside groups may choose to use these principles in whole or adapt them to their needs as they see fit. The principles are not intended to be enforceable rules that must be followed but rather are a well thought out starting point to engage Métis communities in ethical research.

Principle 1 - Reciprocal Relationships

Reciprocity and the need to build relationships between researchers and the community were themes that were put forth consistently. Building these relationships involved three parts: engaging the community by going among the people and becoming known, earning acceptance through this process, and then getting community involvement once the trusting relationship is established. Community involvement can come in the form of knowledge of local customs, input into the research design, utilizing community members in the research processes (note: training community members in interview techniques and other research skill sets may be necessary), etc. By reciprocity it was meant that there would be equal partnerships, which includes equal responsibility and equal benefits. Also, there was the explicit expectation that all involved would learn from each other.

Principle 2 - Respect For

Respect was another idea that was consistently brought up. Specifically there was a need to be respectful of many different factors.

For the Métis participants respect is for 'both' the individual and the collective. This is one thing that makes doing research in Métis communities unique and is consistent with the view that Métis live with a foot in two worlds, an Aboriginal one and a Western one. For example, given a particular situation, a Métis community may choose to want individual consent, collective consent, or both.

Researchers should endeavor to determine if there are any existing practices or protocols in a given community and should respect community practices and protocols (if they exist). These practices and protocols can be very different from community to community and even from individual to individual along a wide ranging contemporary to traditional continuum. Confidentiality should be respected as much as possible.

Researchers should respect individual's autonomy and identity. Individual's views on what community means and who they say they are should be respected. With this point in mind, Métis individual's identity should be respected. They are who they say they are. Similarly, their personal values should not be assumed and taken at face value. Gender in general and a person's gender identity should also be respected. Respect for the above factors is related to and leads neatly into the next principle about safe and inclusive environments.

Principle 3 - Safe and Inclusive Environments

Safe and inclusive environments are essential for engaging in ethical health research with Métis. By this it is meant that research should, when appropriate, be inclusive to youth and elders, all genders and sexual identities, find the correct balance of individual and collective influence, and be inclusive of a variety of concepts of Aboriginality. This principle should follow the life cycle of the research process and is valid before, during and after the research is undertaken.

Principle 4 - Diversity

Diversity is an important ethical concept to be considered and is important for Métis. The diversity of the Métis must be recognized by researchers and taken into account as appropriate. Some of the areas where there is considerable diversity are explained below.

Researchers must recognize that there are a wide variety of concepts of what research is among Métis and that different types of research are more appropriate for various situations.

Researchers must also recognize that Métis participants may have a diverse set of ways of knowing, lenses, or worldviews. This can lead to a diverse set of values and beliefs. Métis do not follow one particular political orientation and researchers should be mindful of this.

There can be a great diversity even within a single Métis community. Individuals within this community may, for example, have beliefs that are anywhere along a belief system continuum from very contemporary to very traditional and they may live their lives according to this system of belief.

Métis are very diffuse geographically, tending not to live in easily recognized, politically bounded, dense areas. (Some exceptions do exist such as the Métis settlements in Alberta or some smaller rural towns that are predominantly Métis). Most Métis are also urban dwellers with about 7 out of 10 living in an urban area.

Principle 5 - Research Should

This principle concentrates on outcomes. Research should have certain outcomes in order for it to be considered ethical. This principle should not be taken as a set of rules but rather as a high bar to aim for when undertaking research in Métis communities.

Research should be relevant to those involved, as much as can reasonably be determined. This may involve communicating with the prospective Métis population in question about what their needs are for research.

Or, if appropriate, it may be necessary to consult with Métis research experts to determine what research is relevant.

Research should be accurate. Professional research that accurately reflects the respondents input is necessary. Checking with respondents to confirm accuracy of interpretation during the analysis process is one strategy to ensure accuracy.

Research should benefit all involved. This benefit is for researchers and community.

Researchers should be responsible and accountable.

Researchers should acknowledge contribution of participants and community partners. In some cases, this may be reflected by having community members names included as authors alongside researchers in any publications.

Research should protect Métis cultural knowledge.

Principle 6 - Métis Context

The importance of knowing the Métis context of research cannot be understated here. Researchers will need to understand relevant history before undertaking Métis research. Knowing history is necessary for understanding Métis values and Métis knowledge. Understanding Métis values and knowledge are important for ensuring that a Métis context is taken into account during research processes and design. Knowing history and the Métis context can also help researchers navigate the political and geographic complexities that may arise.

In order to ensure Métis context it will also be important to involve Métis experts. Métis experts (Métis researchers, Elders, historians etc.) have insight into Métis methodologies and context, and can assist researchers in advancing these methodologies.

One important concept that researchers need to understand when doing research in a Métis context is that Métis may straddle worldviews.

Making assumptions that Métis have either a Western or First Nation worldview can often be incorrect. Just as there is a need to balance the individual and collective there is also a need to balance traditional with contemporary because Métis can fall anywhere on that continuum. Many Métis may experience both insider and outsider perspectives in a given situation.

Category 7 - Evolving Principles

This category, while not a principle in of itself, details some of the practical ideas that were put forth during the Think Tank to keep the principles of Métis research evolving and to keep research about Métis increasing. The Métis Centre of NAHO may have a role to play in advancing some of these ideas (indeed the Métis Centre is already undertaking some projects that address these ideas).

One idea that arose was to build on the capacity that exists. A part of this would be to make appropriate use of existing Métis researchers and their expertise. Establishing who these experts are and what they are working on could be the first step in mobilizing a Métis research dialogue.

Another idea was to have a clearing house for all things related to Métis research. This clearing house would be a place where all articles (or at least references) related to Métis, databases of Métis research, resources, and population statistics are readily available. From this start, there could be products to advance Métis research and ethics discussion produced such as, for example, Métis research methodologies.

Advocacy for new Métis research and specific calls for funding for Métis research is another area that needs to be advanced. Educating Research Ethical Boards about Métis context is another idea that needs to be addressed.

National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
ᑲᓇᑕᒥ ᓄᓇᖃᖅᑳᖅᓯᒪᔪᓄᑦ ᐋᓐᓂᐊᖃᕐᓂᖃᕐᓇᓂᒃ ᑲᑐᔾᔨᖃᑎᒌᑦ