

**RESEARCH ETHICS IN PRACTICE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
QUALITATIVE DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS SUBMITTED TO  
UNIVERSITIES IN THE USA AND THAILAND 2001-2010**

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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 the USA and 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 each conducted by Ph.D. candidates from 2001-2010 in the USA and in Thailand were selected for review and evaluation. Discussions, conclusions and recommendations were then made. The findings of this study reveal that the conduct of qualitative research in the USA is more advanced than those conducted in Thailand in terms of research ethics. At the same time major improvement is needed in the conduct of qualitative research in Thailand. This 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 in Thailand 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 Internal Research Boards (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 and expanded 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). A study of ethical protocol in qualitative research (QR) doctoral dissertations submitted to universities in the USA during 2001-2010 was made and added to this paper. It aims to understand the current practices of the application of research ethics via ethical protocol (EP) in QR conducted by Ph.D. candidates in the USA and Thailand. To guide the study three questions were 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 (QR) dissertations were reviewed. The review of several concepts in this part is adapted from the original study by Joungtrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011) by omitting certain parts that are not relevant to this study. Ten QR dissertations conducted by Ph.D. candidates from 2001-2010 in the USA were selected and evaluated against the three posed questions. A comparison of this study was made with the study of ten QR dissertations submitted to universities in Thailand made in the original study by Joungtrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011) and similarities and differences were identified. Discussions, conclusions and recommendations were then made. The limitations of the study follows.

## THE CONCEPT AND THEORIES OF ETHICS

Ethics can be defined as “the study of what is good and bad, right and wrong, and just and unjust” (Steiner & Steiner, 1994, 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).

In research, “specific ethical issues are, explicitly or not, nested in larger theories of how we decide that an action is right, correct, or appropriate” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 289). 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 in respect to privacy, ensure confidentiality, maximizing benefit, and minimizing 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 average citizens 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 American 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). Detailed procedures for developing a research protocol can be found in Sieber (1992).

In addition to the IRB, a professional code of ethics is one of the measures applying 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 is 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 has "adopted its own code" (p. 138) for examples American Sociological Association (ASA, 1999), Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD, 1999), American Psychological Association (APA, 2002), American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2000), and the American Anthropological Association (AAA, 1998). 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 a research protocol, an ethical protocol in this study refers to ethical measures that the researcher uses 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 their informed consent should be secured (Punch, 1998). This includes the four basic EPs asserted by Christians (2000): informed

consent, deception, privacy and confidentiality, and accuracy. These EPs will be used as a basis for review and evaluation of QR Ph.D. dissertations 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 the 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) presented an 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).

#### **EP APPLICATIONS IN QR DISSERTATIONS CONDUCTED IN THE USA AND THAILAND 2001-2010**

Ten QR dissertations conducted by Ph.D. candidates in the USA 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 conducted in the USA is illustrated in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: EP APPLICATION IN QR DISSERTATIONS CONDUCTED IN THE USA 2001-2010**

| <b>Case</b> | <b>Ethical Issues Identified</b>   | <b>Ethical Literature Presented</b> | <b>Ethical Protocol Applied</b>                                    | <b>Remarks</b>   |
|-------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Case 1      | Yes, Clearly states that an IRB approval must be obtained and the human subjects' procedures must be followed. | No                                  | Yes, informed consent and confidentiality were used in this study. | No ethical literature was presented but ethical protocols were clearly identified and procedures of the application of an ethical protocol were clearly explained. |

| Case   | Ethical Issues Identified   | Ethical Literature Presented   | Ethical Protocol Applied   | Remarks   |
|--------|---|--|--|---|
| Case 2 | Yes, the section of “Ethical Considerations” is clearly identified in the text of the study following with the literature and ethical protocols applied in the study. | Yes, the researcher presented a certain amount of ethical literature including theories by ethical scholars and ethical principles such as the principles of “do no harm” and refers to the code of conduct of the American Psychological Association. | Yes, the researcher states that the underlying ethical consideration of this study involved conscious compliance and conformity with legal, professional, and Institutional standards, laws, and expectancies for the ethical planning, administration, and reporting of research. Reference was made to the code of conduct of the American Psychological Association, and several texts of other ethics scholars. Some ethical protocols used are:<br>-The participant cases are not analyzed to sensationalize or to titillate but to expand the knowledge base to promote understanding of the mechanisms of the topic of the research. They are viewed with respect and within the context of their humanity with universal strivings and frailties<br>-Truth telling or accuracy of recording and interpretation promotes validity and is another ethical standard pursued in this study.<br>-people whose life events are included for case study were called participants or studied persons rather than subjects to avoid the connotation that they are viewed as objects of data rather than real people desiring of respectful treatment. | Meets the requirements of research ethics.          |
| Case 3 | Yes, an “Ethical Considerations” is   | No   | Yes, an ethical protocol is applied concentrating on confidentiality and   | No ethical literature was presented. Explanation of |

| Case   | Ethical Issues Identified   | Ethical Literature Presented   | Ethical Protocol Applied   | Remarks   |
|--------|---|--|--|---|
|        | provided as a separate section in the text of the dissertation.   |  | privacy of participants and compliance with the University IRB regulations.                  | ethical protocol applied in the research was made.  |
| Case 4 | Yes, provided sub-heading of “Informed Consent” and “Confidentiality” in the text of the research.  | Yes, a brief literature review was made along with the explanation of the two ethical protocols used in this research. | Yes, this study used two ethical protocols: informed consent and confidentiality.            | Provide explanation of ethical protocols used in this study along with a brief literature review referring to a few ethical theories presented by scholars and provided samples of forms used in the appendix of the study. This study is considered to meet the requirements of the research ethics. |
| Case 5 | Yes, it was indicated in Step Seven: “Human Subjects Review and Approval”, and Step Nine: “Human Subjects Review and Approval” of the research process.   | No   | Yes, two ethical protocols were used in this research: informed consent and confidentiality. | No ethical literature review was made. However, ethical protocols were presented with detailed explanation of how application was made for each protocol item.  |
| Case 6 | Yes, a section of “Protection of Human Subjects” was provided in the research. In addition the researcher stated that this research was conducted in accordance with the standard requirements of research with human subjects as outlined by the Federal Government. | No   | Yes, two ethical protocols were used in this research: informed consent and confidentiality. | No ethical literature review was made. However, ethical protocols were presented with detailed explanation of how application was made for each protocol item.  |
| Case 7 | Yes, although not specifically identified a statement explaining ethical concerns of the  | No   | Yes, two ethical protocols were used: informed consent and confidentiality.                  | No ethical literature review was made. However, ethical protocols were presented with   |

| Case    | Ethical Issues Identified  | Ethical Literature Presented | Ethical Protocol Applied   | Remarks  |
|---------|--|------------------------------|--|--|
|         | researcher was made in the text of the study.  |                              |  | detailed explanation of how application was made for each protocol item.   |
| Case 8  | Yes, a section of “Ethical Assurance” was specified in the text of the study. The researcher stated that this research complied with the guidelines provided by the university IRB and the American Psychological Association.   | No                           | Yes, informed consent was used as an ethical protocol applied in this study.   | No ethical literature review was made. However, an ethical protocol was presented with a brief explanation of how application was made.        |
| Case 9  | Yes, although not specifically identified as a section in the study the researcher stated in the study report that informed consent was used and pseudonyms were used for each participant.  | No                           | Yes, informed consent and confidentiality were used as ethical protocols in this study.  | No ethical literature review was made. However, ethical protocols were presented with a brief general explanation of how application was made. |
| Case 10 | No, there is no specific ethical issue identified in the text of the report of the study. However, footnotes were made to explain the omission of the names of participants and the name of the companies involved for confidentiality purposes. The informed consent and the university IRB approval forms were shown in the appendix of the study. | No                           | Yes, confidentiality and informed consent. However, there is no specific explanation made on how these two ethical protocols were applied except the footnotes made to explain the omission of the names of participants and the companies involved for confidentiality purpose. | The first name was used in the individual interview transcripts provided in the appendix of the report of the study.                           |

As shown in Table 1, all QR dissertations conducted in the USA have provisions to deal with ethical issues although some of them did not explicitly identify the ethical section in the dissertations. There are two cases (Case 2 and 4) which were considered to meet all the requirements of the research ethics criterion as established in this study. They provided a specific section on ethical issues in the text of the study called “Ethical Considerations” (Case 2) and “Informed Consent” and “Confidentiality”

(Case 4). Ethical literature was reviewed and specific ethical protocols were identified and explanation was made on how to apply them in the study. Eight cases did not provide ethical literature. All cases provided ethical protocols in the study. Informed consent and confidentiality were used in eight cases. Case 8, used only informed consent, and Case 2 used different kinds of ethical protocols.

A summary of each study of ten QR dissertations conducted by Ph.D. candidates in Thailand during 2001-2010 is presented in Table 2. The summary was originally made and presented in the study by Joungrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011).

**TABLE 2: EP APPLICATION IN QR DISSERTATIONS CONDUCTED IN THAILAND 2001-2010**

| Case          | Ethical Issues Identified | Ethical Literature Presented | Ethical Protocol Applied  | Remarks  |
|---------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|
| Case 1 (2001) | No                        | No                           | No  | Indicated position of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant in the text of the data analysis chapter. Interview schedule containing positions and organizations of all participants and resume of each participant are also provided in appendices                                      |
| Case 2 (2006) | 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 (2007) | No                        | No                           | No  | Provided a list of names, positions and organizations of participants in the text of the methodological chapter. Also provided the lists of names, positions, and organizations of each participant in appendices. Pictures of researcher conducting interviews of participants and focus group interviews are displayed in the appendix |
| Case 4 (2008) | No                        | No                           | No  | Makes no mention about ethics in the study   |
| Case 5 (2009) | No                        | No                           | No  | Provided a list of names of participants in the text of the methodological chapter and resumes including details of characters and part of the interview data of each participant in the appendix of the study   |
| Case 6 (2009) | No                        | No                           | No  | Indicated the names of participants with all quotations  |

| Case           | Ethical Issues Identified | Ethical Literature Presented | Ethical Protocol Applied  | Remarks  |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---|--|
|                |                           |                              |   | quoted from interview transcripts and provided a list of names, positions and organizations of all participants in the appendix. Pictures of the researcher conducting interviews of participants and other activities of the study are displayed in the appendix. |
| Case 7 (2009)  | Yes                       | No                           | General statement was used instead of a 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 (2010)  | No                        | No                           | No  | Provided a list of names of participants in the text of the methodological chapter. Resumes of each participant and participants of brain storming sessions are also provided in the appendix  |
| Case 9 (2010)  | No                        | No                           | No  | Indicates the names and positions of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant  |
| Case 10 (2010) | No                        | No                           | No  | Provides positions indicating the organizations of participants with all quotations quoted from interview transcripts of each participant  |

Source: Joungrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011).

As shown in Table 2, according to the following explanation in the original study by Joungrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011), there is only one (Case 7) out of ten QR dissertations reviewed which indicated EP in the report of the 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 feelings 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 participants during the interviews, 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 any ethical issue or literature in the report but provided an EP by using 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 the 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 the 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 Appendices 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 the 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 the data analysis and discussions chapter. One study (Case 4) makes no mention about ethics in the study.

### **COMPARISON OF EP APPLICATIONS IN QR DISSERTATIONS CONDUCTED IN THE USA AND THAILAND 2001-2010**

Based on the review made in Tables 1 and 2, a comparison of the results was made based on the three questions 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 (QR) dissertations were reviewed. One area of major similarities and two major areas of differences were identified. The similarities area is that most of the studies conducted did not provide an ethical literature review. Only two studies in the USA provided an ethical literature review while none of the studies in Thailand provided an ethical literature review. The following areas of difference were identified. First, all studies conducted in the USA identified ethical issues in the studies while there is only one study in Thailand which identified the ethical issue in the study. Second, all the studies in the USA provided ethical protocols in the studies while only two studies in Thailand provided ethical protocols in the studies.

## DISCUSSION

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? In the case of the studies conducted in the USA all studies identified ethical issues in the studies. In the case of the studies conducted in Thailand, 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 can be considered as severely violating 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? In the case of the studies conducted in the USA, it was found that there are only two cases which provided an ethical literature review. In the case of the studies conducted in Thailand, it was found that none of the ten QR dissertations reviewed presented a literature review related to ethics. It is essential that the Ph.D. candidates express their ethical knowledge through the presentation of literature as many of them will become professional researchers when they have completed their Ph.Ds. Ethics is an indispensable component of a 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? In the case of the studies conducted in the USA all studies identified EP in the studies. Most of them used informed consent and confidentiality as their EP. In the case of the studies conducted in Thailand, 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 can be considered that it strongly violates the code of ethics on privacy and confidentiality (Bell & Nutt, 2002; Punch, 1998; Sieber, 1992).

There is clearly an incidence in this study that most of the QR dissertations conducted in the USA complied with EP principles and research ethics. At the same time it was found that most of the QR dissertations conducted in Thailand 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 a 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 can be considered as severely violating 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 presented ethical literature.

The above findings of this study reveal a very serious ethical issue in conducting QR in Thailand. This study reviews ten QR Ph.D. dissertations conducted by ten candidates. 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, so it is very important that they teach especially the teaching of undertaking research properly both in terms of subject matter, content and methodology. If they do not understand and do 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 effectively. This is a very serious problem that needs early 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 have been concentrating on teaching quantitative research in Thailand (Joungtrakul, 2010; Joungtrakul, 2007; Joungtrakul, Aticomswan, & Someran, 2011). Although ethics is important to all kinds of research, however, due to its nature, qualitative research is more sensitive to ethical dilemmas. At the 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 curricula 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 (1986) 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 samples of qualitative studies conducted in the USA are more advanced than those conducted in Thailand in terms of research ethics. At the same time 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 (Joungtrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011).

To improve the current situation in Thailand 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 (Joungtrakul, Sakulkoo & Anantanond (2011).

## **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 and another ten conducted in the USA 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 or the USA. In addition the ten Thai studies selected are written in Thai language. Those dissertations submitted by Ph.D. candidates in English in Thailand or in international programs are not included. At the same time the selection of ten QR dissertations conducted in the USA were also made based on the purposive and convenience techniques. It cannot be claimed that these studies represent all QR dissertations conducted in the USA as well. 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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