

# Conference Abstract

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Title: **Protection of human dignity in research**

Abstract text: The idea of human dignity plays an increasingly larger role in bioethical regulations. When understood as empowerment, it is an instrument of protection of autonomy and rights of persons against unwanted intrusions by others. If interpreted as constraint, it grounds ethical limits on the choices and actions of individuals, including their own choices or actions that affect them. These two aspects of protection of human dignity seem to be based on two different views of obligation. The empowering requirement of informed consent is standardly justified by respect for the subject's autonomy. This justification suggests that persons assume their obligations. However, such requirements as minimisation of risks to research subjects cannot be seen as self-assumed since they constrain decisions and actions of research subjects. Yet, both kinds of requirements are claimed to be grounded in human dignity.

Based on an analysis of international ethical guidelines, recent literature on human dignity, and I. Kant's ethics, I will offer an account of justification of the requirements of informed consent and minimisation of risk. On this account, human dignity is to be seen as pertaining to finite embodied rational agents whose agency is susceptible to harms or fragile. As rational capacity, it commands empowerment of research subjects, and so it requires research participants' informed consent. Since human agency is also finite, and so fragile, it needs to be protected by constraining decisions and actions of both researchers and research participants. An example of such protection is minimisation of risks to research subjects.

When understood as protection of fragile agency, respect for human dignity avoids the seeming inconsistency between justifications of some key requirements of research ethics (e.g. requirement of subjects' informed consent and minimisation of risk to them). It also explains these requirements in the way suggested by ethical guidelines. Additionally, the view makes the apparent opposition between the empowering and the constraining aspects of protection of human dignity understandable.

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