Ethical Guidelines for Statistical Practice

Prepared by the Committee on Professional Ethics

Approved by the Board of Directors, August 7, 1999

Executive Summary

This document contains two parts: I. Preamble (#preamble) and II. Ethical Guidelines (#eguidelines). The Preamble addresses **A. Purpose of the Guidelines, B. Statistics and Society**, and **C. Shared Values**. The purpose of the document is to encourage ethical and effective statistical work in morally conducive working environments. It is also intended to assist students in learning to perform statistical work responsibly. Statistics plays a vital role in many aspects of science, the economy, governance, and even entertainment. It is important that all statistical practitioners recognize their potential impact on the broader society and the attendant ethical obligations to perform their work responsibly. Furthermore, practitioners are encouraged to exercise "good professional citizenship" in order to improve the public climate for, understanding of, and respect for the use of statistics throughout its range of applications.

The **Ethical Guidelines** address eight general topic areas and specify important ethical considerations under each topic.

A. Professionalism (#professionalism) points out the need for competence, judgment, diligence, self-respect, and worthiness of the respect of other people.

B. Responsibilities (#responsibilities_funders) to Funders, Clients, and Employers discusses the practitioner's responsibility for assuring that statistical work is suitable to the needs and resources of those who are paying for it, that funders understand the capabilities and limitations of statistics in addressing their problem, and that the funder's confidential information is protected.

C. Responsibilities in Publications and Testimony (#responsibilities_publications) addresses the need to report sufficient information to give readers, including other practitioners, a clear understanding of the intent of the work, how and by whom it was performed, and any limitations on its validity.

D. Responsibilities to Research Subjects (#responsibilities_research) describes requirements for protecting the interests of human and animal subjects of research-not only during data collection but also in the analysis, interpretation, and publication of the resulting findings.

E. Responsibilities to Research Team Colleagues (#responsibilities_colleagues) addresses the mutual responsibilities of professionals participating in multidisciplinary research teams.

F. Responsibilities to Other Statisticians or Statistical Practitioners (#responsibilities_statisticians) notes the interdependence of professionals doing similar work, whether in the same or different organizations. Basically, they must contribute to the strength of their professions overall by sharing nonproprietary data and methods, participating in peer review, and respecting differing professional opinions.

G. Responsibilities Regarding Allegations of Misconduct (#responsibilities_misconduct) addresses the sometimes painful process of investigating potential ethical violations and treating those involved with both justice and respect.

H. Responsibilities of Employers (#responsibilities_employers), Including Organizations, Individuals, Attorneys, or Other Clients Employing Statistical Practitioners encourages employers and clients to recognize the highly interdependent nature of statistical ethics and statistical validity. Employers and clients must not pressure practitioners to produce a particular "result," regardless of its statistical validity. They must avoid the potential social harm that can result from the dissemination of false or misleading statistical work.