

The South African Heart Journal and the Protection of Personal Information Act

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The Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2018 (POPIA), which came into effect on 1 July 2021, applies to research activities that involve identifiable personal information of individuals or organisations. Considering the impact that research has on participants' right to privacy is not just a POPIA obligation, it is also an integral part of research ethics and conduct. The South African Heart Journal takes information security seriously and urges all authors to consider prioritising this in all submissions. In turn, the Journal will endeavour to protect personal information of researchers as well as their research participants. The Journal commits to upholding research and publishing practices that always protect the identity of researchers and research participants (Table 1).

Our advice to researchers is that:

- all manuscripts submitted to the Journal must always contain de-identified information,
- researchers must collect as little personal information as possible,
- researchers must be transparent, and
- researchers must always keep research data safe.

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TABLE 1: POPIA principles and guidance for researchers.

Principle	Recommended action by researchers	POPIA guidance
Information de-identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect anonymised research data. • De-identify data as soon as possible. • Mask the identity of research participants (pseudonymisation). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part B, section 1.1.2 of the Code deals with de-identification and pseudonymisation. • Practice must align with institutional policies and processes for data anonymisation.
Collect as little as possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear on why you need to collect personal information. • Be clear about how you will use personal information in research. • Aim to always achieve research goals without using personal information of participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part B, section 7 of the Code deals with minimal processing.
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research participants must be well-informed about the purpose of the research and how their personal details are used and protected. • Ensure that systems are in place to ensure all members of the research team can protect the privacy of research participants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part B, section 9 of the Code deals with POPIA's transparency requirements.
Data safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research data must be kept and shared in a secure manner. • Institutional policies for data safety must be adhered to. • Sensitive research data must ideally be encrypted. • Secure data back-up systems are essential. • Restrict access to identifiable personal information to researchers on a "need to know" basis. 	