Ethical challenges when conducting research in conflict settings: experiences from South Sudan

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Introduction

- South Sudan is the world’s newest state and due to its conflict-ridden history, it experiences some of the worst human developmental outcomes.

- Humanitarian organizations are increasingly recognizing the need of evidence-based research to inform policy and programming.
Research ethics challenges

South Sudan presents several challenges which influences how research is conducted.

- First, the capacity of the ethics review board to review technical proposals is not clear—proposals are approved without questions/reviews.

- South Sudan, especially in rural areas, is a difficult place to collect primary data due to insecurity and logistical challenges—no roads, no phone networks
Research ethics challenges cont.

- Language barriers complicate informed consent processes; it is difficult getting native speakers who can translate complex research terms (randomize, reimbursement/payment to the local language.

- Lack of qualified translators affects translation, important nuances may be lost. Due to low education levels, it is also difficult to find and hire literate research assistants.
- Laptops and any type of recording devices are viewed with suspicion in South Sudan and often requires special permits to carry, which complicates the research process.

- Identifying information such as tribe is difficult to collect owing to historical issues of ethnic profiling of specific groups thus emphasizing the need for confidentiality.
Research ethics challenges cont.

- In some instances, community gatekeepers are armed actors, making it difficult to discern between coercion and voluntary participation.
- Study respondents travel long distances and in dangerous conditions to participate in research.
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Thank you

Questions, queries, comments

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