

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.

Research ethics challenges cont.

- 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.



Research ethics challenges cont.

- Study respondents travel long distances and in dangerous conditions to participate in research. However they are not reimbursed as it is difficult to balance between compensating them for exposure to the study risks and giving them an amount that does not constitute undue influence.

Thank you

Questions, queries, comments

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