DO APPROACHES TO THE TRAINING AND SUPERVISION OF RESEARCHERS PROMOTE OR CONSTRAIN ETHICAL RESEARCH PRACTICE IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS?

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Delivered at the PREA Conference "Ethics and Humanitarian Research", March 2019

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Empirical research

Researchers' construction and management of ethical issues in post-conflict mental health research: a qualitative study

- Setting: 3 post-conflict South Asian countries

	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3
PI	2	2	1
Research supervisor	3	2 (1 Interpreted)	2 (1 interpreted)
Research assistants (RA's)	12 (all Interpreted)	5 (4 Interpreted)	6 (all interpreted)

- Qualitative methodology: In-depth interviews
  - Interpreters involved *(Chiumento et al, 2017)*

- Thematic data analysis

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Depth of training required for RA's

"for the research assistants…the philosophical basis of ethics…was not…focused on, because that was not…relevant. It was more about the practical issues…what ethics is and…why ethics is needed and why do you need to adhere to these principles when we conduct interviews, from the moment you approach a person, to the moment that you finish the interview. That was the training that was given." (Supervisor)

RA's:

- Local hires
- Short term, project-based
- No prior research experience assumed

- Don't require in-depth bioethical knowledge

- Focus: *practical application* of ethics through procedures

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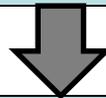
Training model for research assistants

1. Theoretical: ethical principles & procedures. *Ethical exam.*

2. Practical application: role play; communication skills.

3. Pilot testing of research procedures under intensive supervision & with ongoing training

4. Routine implementation with monitoring & supervision

1. Theoretical training: ethical principles & procedures

"**we have developed these…slides… Which…I will say is systematic, because…we apply those, [to] every you know…training**" (PI)

- **Knowledge transfer**

- **Ethics content:**
  - Autonomy achieved via informed consent
  - Do no harm
  - Justice or fairness in participant selection
  - Potential participant / group vulnerabilities e.g. children, participant distress, impact of conflict / disaster on wellbeing
  - Maintaining confidentiality
  - Importance of reliable data to inform service provision

- Term "ethics" often not explicitly applied

Ethical exam *(one country only)*

> "What we, we want to mm get is, whether our team is following basic things about the ethics. Whether they are clear. What they…should follow, or…do not follow. …they are mostly related to field level information…we want to make sure is that they have understood basic ethical issues. That's…the objective of, of this brief assessment tools." (Supervisor)

- Addressed core ethical principles & procedures
- 8 questions, required correct response to 6 to pass
- Additional training & repeat testing where required

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2. Practical application

- Role play consent process & administering instruments / qualitative interviewing

- Aim: to promote an **"empathetic stance"**

> **"do [RA's} have interviewing skills that are ...matching the vulnerabilities and sensitivity. I really hope that our longer term training…we have quite a bit of emphasis on… communication skills er, sensitive interviewing skills." (PI)**

3. Pilot implementation under intensive supervision

> "*he says…it's important to inform them about the challenges…to come up with a solution… And to…share…techniques…so…other research team members [are] informed about this too…to prepare them…[a]bout the challenges they face and how they could tackle those.*" (RA - interpreted)

- Field observation of RA's by supervisors
- Adaptation of consent documents & instruments
- Group supervision at end of each day

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4. Routine implementation with ongoing monitoring & supervision

- **Monitoring:**
    - Field-based observation; dummy participants & calling participants; avoiding **"cooked"** data
    - **"I don't compromise [on monitoring]…It's not distrust…my responsibility is to defend. ( ) And to do that I have to have confidence [in RA's]." (PI)**
    - RA safety

- **Supervision:**
    - **"different layers and meetings, informal and formal where discussion happens about the research where I think, potentially issues can be picked up." (PI)**

What approach to ethics does this RA training model…

Promote?

- Ethics as verifiable principles / procedures

- Standardisation

- Ethics = integral to practice

- "Soft" interpersonal skills

- Relationship between trust & research ethics

Constrain?

- Ethics as balancing of principles to reach judgement

- Contextual application of ethics

- RA monitoring as displaying distrust

Implications & concluding thoughts

"the novice researcher is usually taught that the research process is orderly and straightforward" (Dunn, 1991: p.388)

"ethical conduct of research ultimately depends upon the personal integrity and training of researcher(s)" (Ruiz-Casares, 2014, p.796)

"the presence of an intelligent, informed, conscientious, compassionate, responsible investigator" (Beecher, 1966, p.274)

➢ Ethical framework to inform decision making

➢ Supervision: explicit recognition of in-practice ethical moments

➢ Mentorship

THANK YOU!

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