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Tables des matieres / Table of Contents

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ÉDITORIAL / EDITORIAL

Launch of the *Canadian Journal of Bioethics*

Bryn Williams-Jones[1], Charles Dupras[2], Vincent Couture[2], Renaud Boulanger[2]

After six years (2012-2017) of publishing innovative bioethics scholarship, *BioéthiqueOnline* becomes the *Canadian Journal of Bioethics/Revue canadienne de bioéthique* (cjb-rcb.ca). As executive editors of *BioéthiqueOnline,* we frequently heard from members of the Canadian bioethics community of the need to develop a platform with the right branding to showcase the value and the richness of our collective reflections, both locally and internationally. Following discussions with colleagues across the country, we came to the conclusion that *BioéthiqueOnline* had developed a unique expertise publishing bioethics scholarship, but that the original name, created to convey the bilingual and open access mission of the journal, was not enthusiastically received. So the time has come to upgrade and rebrand as the *Canadian Journal of Bioethics* (CJB).

The journal's mission remains unchanged: it will continue to provide a bilingual (French and English) space for diverse forms of high quality and thought-provoking scholarship (e.g., peer-reviewed articles and commentaries, reviews, editorials, case studies, creative works) from across the full range of bioethics specialties (e.g., clinical ethics, research ethics, public health ethics, technology ethics, professional ethics). The journal maintains its philosophy of publishing fully open access – that is, free from author publication charges or access fees. For those who grew accustomed to relying on *BioéthiqueOnline* for updates on bioethics related news, events, and job opportunities, rest assured that this resource will remain! *BioéthiqueOnline* will now be the social media arm of the journal (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), and share relevant information about Canadian bioethics. Both the *CJB* and *BioéthiqueOnline* wll continue to be hosted by the Bioethics Program at the School of Public Health of the Université de Montréal.

Exciting enhancements come with the journal's rebranding:

1. We are proud to annouce the **creation of an Advisory Board** composed of established international bioethics scholars, who will share their comprehensive and complementary expertise with the Editorial Board. This addition to the *CJB* structure is an indication that a project that was originally student-led has matured into an initiative that is poised to expand its presence across the Canadian and international bioethics landscapes. We are grateful to the members of the Advisory Board for their support of our vision.

2. Another major innovation is the **implementation of a new workflow platform: the Open Journal Systems** (Public Knowledge Project). This move will substantiallly improve the submission process and workflow management. The adoption of the plaftorm is a reflection of the journal's desire to be responsive to the needs expressed by its authors and readership: moving away from an email-based submission system will improve manuscript tracking, and open up new accountability and transparency tools for both contributors and editors.

3. We have also moved to **a new publication model: a hybrid form** combining Open Issues (manuscripts published on a rolling basis as they are ready) and Special Issues (manuscripts that form a cohesive package and that are published together). Special Issues will be produced in partnership with guest editors and will be an opportunity to focus on an issue that is both timely and that may have received too little attention by our community. This new publication model will allow for the continued timely publication of manuscripts, while opening new opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations. This first Special Issue inaugrates the new format.

We are proud of this first issue as it is a perfect illustration of the journal's renewed focus. This special issue on *Ethics and International Development Research* illustrates the tension between working under the auspices of a Canadian institution while conducting research abroad. By offering an opportunity to young researchers supported by a Canadian funding agency, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), to share their experience conducting research abroad, we seek to meet a number of goals. Most of the cases presented look at research ethics from the perspective of projects that are not exclusively health-focused, a blindspot of much of the research ethics literature. We believe researchers traveling to some of the countries discussed in this issue will find guidance on how to approach local research ethics review. In addition, we hope to introduce the Canadian and international bioethics community to the work of an organisation, the IDRC, of which many might not be aware, despite its rich history and global impact. And at a time where the political pressure to close borders should worry bioethicists worldwide, the choice of a resolutely internationalist issue for the launch of the *Canadian Journal of Bioethics* is deliberate.

We hope you enjoy this first issue of the new journal, and we look forward to working with you to continue to make this platform a reference for innovative scholarship. So please consider becoming involved, whether as an author, a guest editor, a peer-

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reviewer, or a member of the Editorial Board! It is only through your involvement that we can collectively make sure this platform meets our diverse needs as members of the Canadian and international bioethics community.

Lancement de la *Revue canadienne de bioéthique*

Après six années (2012-2017) de publication de recherches novatrices dans le domaine de la bioéthique, la revue *BioéthiqueOnline* devient la *Revue canadienne de bioéthique/Canadian Journal of Bioethics* (cjb-rcb.ca). En tant qu'éditeurs exécutifs de *BioéthiqueOnline*, nous avons fréquemment entendu des membres de la communauté canadienne de bioéthique parler de la nécessité de développer une plateforme de publication dont l'image refléterait l'étendue et la richesse de nos réflexions collectives, à l'échelle nationale et internationale. Suite à plusieurs discussions avec des collègues à travers le pays au sujet de l'expertise unique développée au cours des dernières années par l'équipe de *BioéthiqueOnline*, nous avons compris que le nom de notre revue – choisi à l'origine pour refléter son bilinguisme et ses publications en accès libre – ne générait pas l'enthousiasme espéré. Il nous est alors apparu pertinent de renommer notre plateforme la *Revue canadienne de bioéthique* (RCB) et de procéder, du même coup, à quelques améliorations significatives de son fonctionnement.

Notre mission demeure la même : la *RCB* continuera à offrir un espace bilingue (français et anglais) pour la publication de diverses formes de manuscrits (ex. articles et commentaires évalués par des pairs, éditoriaux, études de cas, travaux créatifs) de haute qualité, stimulant la réflexion et provenant de tous les champs de spécialisation en bioéthique (ex. éthique clinique, éthique de la recherche, éthique et santé publique, éthique du développement des technologies, éthique professionnelle). La revue maintient aussi sa philosophie de publication en accès libre – c'est-à-dire sans aucuns frais de publication pour les auteurs ou frais d'accès pour les lecteurs. Pour ceux qui s'étaient habitués à compter sur *BioéthiqueOnline* pour rester informés des nouvelles, événements et offres d'emploi liés à la bioéthique, cette ressource demeure en fonction! *BioéthiqueOnline* sera dorénavant la centrale « médias sociaux » de la revue (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn). À travers celle-ci, nous continuerons à diffuser des informations récentes et pertinentes pour la bioéthique canadienne. La *RCB* et *BioéthiqueOnline* resteront tous les deux hébergés par les Programmes de bioéthique de l'École de santé publique de l'Université de Montréal.

Des améliorations significatives accompagnent la nouvelle image de marque de la revue:

1. Nous sommes fiers d'annoncer la **création d'un nouveau Comité consultatif** composé de chercheurs canadiens et internationaux reconnus en bioéthique qui partageront leurs expertises diversifiées et complémentaires avec le comité éditorial. Cette nouveauté à la structure de la *RCB* démontre que l'initiative entreprise et dirigée au départ par des étudiants a grandi pour étendre sa présence au sein de la bioéthique canadienne et à travers le monde. Nous sommes d'ailleurs très reconnaissants envers les membres du Comité consultatif pour leur soutien à la vision promue par cette initiative.

2. Une autre nouveauté importante est la mise en application d'un **nouveau système de gestion : l'Open Journal Systems** (Public Knowledge Project). Cette nouvelle plateforme aura pour effet de faciliter le processus de soumission et le suivi du travail d'évaluation par les éditeurs et par les pairs. Elle nous permettra de nous éloigner d'un système encombrant de communications par courriel, allégera le suivi des manuscrits en temps réel et nous procurera de nouveaux outils favorisant la responsabilisation des contributeurs et la transparence des procédures.

3. Nous adoptons aussi un **nouveau modèle de publication : une approche hybride** combinant des numéros ouverts (manuscrits publiés en continu, dès qu'ils sont acceptés et mis en forme) et des numéros spéciaux (recueils de manuscrits publiés simultanément). Les numéros spéciaux seront produits en partenariat avec des éditeurs invités. Ils se concentreront sur une question d'actualité, ayant reçu encore trop peu d'attention de la part de notre communauté. Ce modèle hybride de publication, en plus de permettre la publication des manuscrits en continu, offre de nouvelles opportunités de collaboration interdisciplinaire autour d'un objet d'étude précis. Ce premier numéro spécial inaugure cette nouvelle formule.

Nous sommes fiers de ce numéro inaugural, car il s'agit d'une illustration parfaite de l'approche renouvelée de notre revue. Ce numéro spécial, portant sur l'*Éthique et la recherche en développement international*, illustre la tension inhérente au travail de chercheurs affiliés à une institution canadienne et conduisant des études à l'étranger. En offrant à de jeunes chercheurs soutenus par un organisme de financement canadien – le Centre de recherches pour le développement international (CRDI) – l'occasion de partager leur expérience de recherche à l'étranger, nous cherchions à atteindre un certain nombre d'objectifs. La plupart des études de cas présentées ici se penchent sur l'éthique de la recherche du point de vue de projets qui ne sont pas exclusivement axés sur la santé, un point faible de nombreuses évaluations en éthique de la recherche. Nous croyons que les chercheurs qui se rendront dans certains pays mentionnés dans ce numéro trouveront des conseils sur la façon d'aborder l'encadrement de l'éthique de la recherche au niveau local. Nous espérons aussi présenter à la communauté canadienne et internationale de bioéthique le travail d'une organisation, le CRDI, dont la riche histoire et l'impact à l'échelle internationale méritent d'être soulignés. À un moment où les pressions politiques pour fermer les frontières devraient inquiéter les bioéthiciens à travers le monde, le choix de produire un numéro résolument internationaliste pour le lancement de la *Revue canadienne de bioéthique* était délibéré.

Nous espérons que vous apprécierez ce premier numéro de la nouvelle revue et nous sommes impatients de travailler avec vous pour continuer de faire de cette plateforme une référence en matière de publication de la recherche en bioéthique. N'hésitez pas à vous impliquer, que ce soit en tant qu'auteur, éditeur invité, évaluateur externe ou membre du comité éditorial! C'est grâce à votre implication que nous construirons, collectivement, la *RCB* qui répondra aux besoins diversifiés que nous éprouvons comme membres de la communauté canadienne et internationale de bioéthique.

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ÉDITORIAL INVITÉ / GUEST EDITORIAL

Ethical Challenges Faced by Development Researchers in Low and Middle-Income Countries

Ayah Nayfeh[1,2], Dominique Charron[1]

Introduction

Researchers play an important role in setting the ethical standards of development research in low and middle-income countries (LMIC). In most high-income countries, researchers and research institutions and their staff and students operate within common research ethics policy frameworks, like Canada's *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) [1]. However, this is not the case in multi-jurisdictional research, particularly in settings involving funding from high-income countries for research in LMIC, with or without the participation of high-income country researchers. In such settings, not only may there be differences of ethical standards in conducting research or oversight capacity, but the nature of the ethical dilemmas themselves are changed [2]. For instance, the local context in different jurisdictions may change how research design affects the dignity, autonomy or welfare of local participants.

As stipulated in the TCPS2 multijurisdictional research involving humans must ensure a proportionate balance between the core principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice, as well as due consideration of locally relevant policies and applicable laws and regulations of all jurisdictions [1]. Unfortunately, the scarcity of scholarly resources on research ethics in development contexts makes it difficult for researchers from high-income countries to understand the political, legal and sociocultural differences to appropriately assess ethical considerations in LMIC [3,4].

Compared to other stakeholders involved in the research process, such as funding donors, research ethics committees (RECs) and research institutions, local RECs might be in the strongest position to assess whether the research complies with local laws and regulations or whether it imposes any risk that may be unknown to foreign researchers [1,5]. Furthermore, local RECs with the legal capacity for ethics oversight can help countries and institutions keep track of research that is being conducted within their jurisdiction, and can offer a mechanism to hold researchers accountable if their research causes harm.

Unfortunately, local RECs in some LMICs are not well-established or are entirely absent [6]. Further, the limited academic literature that is available on conducting research with human participants in LMIC fails to address research other than clinical research, and neglects to guide methodologies widely used in international development (particularly collaborative or transdisciplinary natural and social science research) [3,6]. While defaulting to western bioethical frameworks assures that the proposed research is in line with high-income country codes of research ethics, compliance with such frameworks alone may not be adequate for ensuring the safety, dignity and autonomy of participants in LMICs.

The authors of the different manuscripts are former Professional Development Award Recipients and Research Award Recipients from multi-disciplinary backgrounds that conducted field research between 2016-2017 as part of their 12-month award with the support of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).[1]

IDRC mandates that the research it supports, in part or in full, always be conducted in accordance with the highest recognized ethical standards that are applicable. This includes research involving human participants, research involving non-human animals, and research subject to additional regulatory requirements (for example, research involving genetically modified organisms). Research Award Recipients' proposals undergo an internal research ethics assessment prior to the commencement of their research in the field. This process, coordinated by IDRC's Advisory Committee on Research Ethics, prompts early-career researchers to seek local ethics review mechanisms; to appropriately consider cultural norms and practices; and to make recommendations of strategies to minimize risks and maximize benefits for the individuals participating in, or affected by, the research. This internal process becomes particularly important for field research where local RECs do not exist; where ethical review processes and infrastructures are weak or difficult to navigate; or where non-clinical research is not clearly regulated. These efforts are complemented by policies on mandatory research ethics training and institutional initiatives that aim to promote awareness and application of research ethics. Award recipients are asked to provide feedback to IDRC on their experience, including research ethics training and oversight. Some of the papers in this special issue reflect

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[1] The Research Awards program at IDRC offers aspiring new investigators an opportunity to hone their research skills in an international context, and is emblematic of IDRC's capacity-building and educational mission to build the next generation of international development leaders. The program provides hands-on experience in research management and in the creation, dissemination, and use of knowledge from an international perspective. It also includes a bursary for a 6-month program of research on a topic of international development.

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perceived gaps and inefficiencies in IDRC process. As a learning organization, IDRC uses this information to continually improve the effectiveness of our support and oversight of research ethics.

This special issue sheds light on the reality of "ethical challenges encountered by researchers from high-income countries working in low- or middle-income countries" on international development research (and particularly non-health-related research), a domain often neglected by the research ethics community [7,8]. Our aim with this article is to introduce ten case studies that illustrate some of the distinctive ethical challenges and experiences faced by development researchers in navigating local ethical requirements in Nepal, Ethiopia, Guyana, Colombia, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Peru, and India. The case studies are accompanied by a peer-reviewed article authored by the editors of the special issue that underscores the importance of local ethics review from the perspective of social justice.

Gaining knowledge of the local context and navigating local research ethics oversight systems are often a challenge for early-career international development researchers, as information on the existence of local RECs and requirements for ethics approval are not always readily accessible [6]. This challenge is explicit in the first case study by Gloria Song entitled "*Guyana – How do you know where to get the information you need? Determining ethics approval requirements in a developing country"* [9]. When a web search did not provide any information on local ethical requirements for legal and social sciences research in Guyana, Song describes the various methods and sources that she consulted before concluding that there was no national research ethics approval body in Guyana. Correspondence with a regional bioethics organization, local researchers, Guyanese government offices, and the Guyanese High Commission ultimately served as a valuable resource for understanding the local ethics requirements and standards for conducting research on Guyana's Domestic Violence Act with justice service providers. In doing so, this case study reflects on the importance of researchers doing their due diligence to gain knowledge of local ethical requirements.

Gussai Sheikheldin's case study *"Responsible access to data in international field research: a case study from Tanzania"* documents the challenges in obtaining information on the processes required to respect local laws and regulations in Tanzania [10]. In addition to obtaining ethical clearance from the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology, Sheikheldin describes the process of obtaining a residence visa to conduct his research in a way that does not violate local laws of legal residency. The article goes on to discuss how failure to obtain a research permit before conducting field research in Tanzania can result in a number of harmful consequences on the Tanzanian local ethics capacity.

Navigating local ethics review does not need to be difficult and can be straightforward if the researcher limits their assumptions regarding the process and engages with the local REC early on. In Sunisha Neupane's case study *"Nepal Health Research Council paves path to ethical research processes",* she highlights the hassle-free and easy process that she experienced in acquiring ethics approval for a health-related research project in Nepal [11]. Although the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) requires research involving human participants to undergo local ethics approval, there is a low adherence rate for ethics approval in the country. Neupane and Sinha describe how even in the wake of extenuating local circumstances, undertaking local ethics review through the NHRC was not considered a "barrier" to the research process. The authors conclude that foreign researchers ought to do their due diligence in following host-country guidelines as a matter of principle, and must put aside the assumption that obtaining local ethics review delays the research process.

Juan Rivillas illustrates in his case study *"Seeking ethics approval in Colombia: a health systems research case study"* how Resolution 8430 – a legal framework provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection for carrying out health research in Colombia – was implemented for his project as a researcher affiliated with a foreign institution [12]. The resolution states that ethics approval must be provided either by the researcher's institution, the institution in which the research will be conducted, or the health authority responsible for the communities participating in the research. After struggling to gain information about research ethics oversight from collaborating local health care facilities, the authors reflect on the need for more guidance for researchers who are not affiliated with Colombian institutions regarding ethics review and approvals. Collaborative partnerships with local researchers throughout the course of the research provided valuable insights and a better understanding of the ethics approval process within Colombia. Reflecting on his experience, the author suggests that an earlier engagement with local researchers and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection woud have facilitated the connection with and involvement of local health facilities or health authorities to conduct fieldwork in Colombia.

Logan Cochrane also elaborates on the importance of social capital in his case study *"Ethiopia: obtaining ethics approval and the role of social capital",* and the role that relationships can play in ensuring that local ethical processes are clearly understood and complete [13]. Based on his research experience in Ethiopia, Cochrane describes how the challenges in the local ethics review process are not due to a lack of policies or REC infrastructure, but rather to the difficulties in accessing the necessary information. Local collaborative partnerships enable access to information on the ethical review process and help guide researchers through local laws, regulations, and expectations. Like Rivillas, he too highlights the role that local networks played in helping him, a foreign researcher, navigate an unfamiliar system and provide the necessary information and knowledge of local processes. This case study proposes several mechanisms that universities and research institutions in high-income countries can use to play a more pro-active role in facilitating the local ethics review process and ensure that national ethics approval is obtained.

In Mathieu Feagan's case study *"Ethical evaluation and action research: toward new north-south research collaborations?"*, he discusses how collaborative partnerships between high-income researchers and local researchers and organizations typically impose Northern research priorities and frameworks on Southern communities, undervaluing the knowledge those communities have already developed [14]. In this case study, Feagan reflects on his experience and challenges with obtaining ethics approval for an action research project dealing with dynamic group processes, whereby the notions of recruitment, consent and data collection emerge in accordance with the needs of the peer group. He describes how the action research framework intersects with dominant North-South power dynamics, and suggests that a shift is needed from Northern ethical review processes to ensure that knowledge is created with, not only about, people in action-oriented research projects.

North-South power dynamics between researchers and study participants call for unique strategies that minimize any potential risk that may be imposed on participants in the different local contexts. In the case study *“Being ethical in a context with limited ethics oversight: a study on flooding risk management by local governments in India”,* Nidhi Subramanyam illustrates how foreign researchers and Northern RECs must carefully consider the conditions and sociocultural differences under which individual participants provide consent [15]. This case study reflects on how, a permit to conduct research, obtained from local or regional authorities in India, may inadvertently exert coercion on potential participants of the study, in particular staff of those authorities. Unintended risks such as reputational damage or institutional stigmatization can occur inadvertently from consenting participants who provide responses critical of authorities. Subramanyam describes in detail the process she followed to ensure voluntary and autonomous consent was provided within a hierarchical institutional context, and the important considerations that were made to avoid participant exposure to any unintended risks.

The process of obtaining consent and sociocultural considerations that must be made with different groups also emerged in Erika Malich’s case study *“Consent documentation and the accessibility of research results in international development research”* [16]. Malich describes her experience in selecting a culturally and contextually appropriate method to document informed consent with different groups in Latin America. For example, it became apparent throughout the course of conducting interviews that written consent was not common research practice for participants. Particularly in settings where local RECs do not exist, this case study suggests that it is the shared responsibility of the researcher and their home country REC to understand the specifics of both the cultural context and the power asymmetries that may prevail among research participants before deciding on the best method for documenting consent.

While the mandate of a REC is primarily to protect research participants, Nirojan Kulendrarajah highlights in his case study *“Positionality and reverse asymmetry in research ethics in international development: learning from experiences in researching South Asian philanthropy”* that not all research participants belong to vulnerable groups as is frequently the case in international development research [17]. Different sociocultural contexts can create a condition of reverse asymmetry, whereby the researcher holds a lower position of power and privilege and that can pose risks to the researcher and the research process. Kulendrarajah walks us through his experience with reverse power asymmetry in conducting research with individuals from high socioeconomic positions in India. While this contributed to a more relaxed, collegial environment in the interview process, the reverse asymmetry actually made it difficult to secure interviews with senior officials who could have provided valuable information on the subject matter. This case study reflects on the important role of local RECs providing local and context-specific ethical issues that may emerge for Northern researchers such as reverse asymmetry.

Finally, in summary of the experiences and challenges faced by foreign researchers conducting fieldwork in LMIC, the main article of this special issue underscores the importance of adhering to local ethical requirements in the conduct of development research, and the appropriate consideration that must be given to the political, legal, and cultural specificities of the local context [6]. Using the perspective of social justice, the article proposes several mechanisms in which Northern researchers and institutions, such as universities and funding donors, should enforce to be socially accountable and sensitive to all local ethics requirements, particularly those of local RECs, across jurisdictions. These measures not only maximize respect for local knowledge and local ethics oversight capacity; they uphold social justice by demanding that researchers be more aware of the risks and burdens of their research on local study participants.

Conclusion

Consideration of cultural norms, practices, and legal specificities of local contexts is a matter of social justice, yet researchers continue to face challenges in navigating local ethics review mechanisms that help ensure the responsible conduct of development research. The case studies of this special issue reflect on the meaning of social accountability and the responsibilities researchers have towards research participants and the foreign jurisdictions in which they work. This journal supplement contributes to the on-going dialogue on global research ethics, and aims to increase support and space for international development researchers in the North and South to share their reflections, analysis, experiences and insights on how they can address and improve research ethics practice within their own countries. As part of their reflections and learning, some authors have highlighted potential gaps among processes and institutional arrangements for the oversight of foreign-led, social sciences or participatory research ethics in the countries where they conducted research. The views of the authors are their own, and not a reflection of IDRC opinion or policy.

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Les opinions exprimées dans cet ouvrage sont celles des auteurs et ne représentent pas nécessairement celles du CRDI ou de son conseil d'administration.

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L Cochrane, R-F Boulanger, G-H Sheikheldin, G Song *Can J Bioeth / Rev Can Bioeth.* 2018, 1(1):8-16

Canadian Journal of Bioethics
Revue canadienne de bioéthique

ARTICLE (ÉVALUÉ PAR LES PAIRS / PEER-REVIEWED)

The Case for Local Ethics Oversight in International Development Research

Logan Cochrane[1], Renaud F. Boulanger[2], Gussai H. Sheikheldin[3], Gloria Song[4]

Résumé

Cet article fait valoir que la recherche sur le développement international devrait être soumise à la surveillance des comités d'éthique de la recherche dans les pays où les données seront collectées. Cela inclut les personnes ayant un statut qui leur permet de se soustraire des lignes directrices ou des politiques d'éthique, telles que les personnes engagées par des organisations non gouvernementales. L'argument repose sur une compréhension de la justice sociale qui reconnaît que ne pas rechercher l'approbation éthique au niveau local peut être un affront au mouvement de décolonisation et peut entraîner des dommages directs importants pour les participants. La supervision éthique au niveau local favorise une meilleure prise en compte des législations locales, des règlements, des priorités et du contexte. Par exemple, un comité d'éthique de la recherche local est souvent mieux placé qu'un comité étranger pour évaluer si un projet proposé comporte des risques spécifiques au contexte donné. En outre, le fait de soumettre un projet à un comité d'éthique de la recherche local permet de reconnaître la légitimité des autorités locales, prenant ainsi position contre l'histoire de la perte de pouvoir en lien avec la colonisation. La supervision locale permet d'accroître la responsabilité des chercheurs travaillant à l'étranger : si l'autorité locale et l'adaptation au contexte spécifique doivent être respectées, il doit y avoir des mécanismes pour s'assurer que la recherche qui ne satisfait pas à ces exigences ne peut avoir lieu. Les objections fondées sur la capacité limitée de supervision dans certains pays et sur les préoccupations liées à la politisation du processus d'évaluation sont abordées. Enfin, les rôles et les responsabilités des différentes parties prenantes dans la mise en œuvre d'une plus grande supervision éthique au niveau local sont définis.

Mots clés

études sur le développement, recherche en développement international, éthique de la recherche

Abstract

This paper argues that international development research should be submitted to the oversight of research ethics committees from the countries where data will be collected. This includes research conducted by individuals who may fall outside the jurisdictions of most ethics guidelines or policies, such as individuals contracted by non-governmental organizations. The argument is grounded in an understanding of social justice that recognizes that not seeking local ethics approval can be an affront to the decolonization movement, and may lead to significant direct harms to participants. Local ethics oversight can help ensure projects appropriately take into consideration local laws, regulations, priorities and context. For example, a local research ethics committee may be in a better position than a foreign one to assess whether any given proposed project carries context-specific risks. In addition, submitting to a local research ethics committee is to acknowledge the legitimacy of local authorities, thereby taking a stance against the history of colonizing disempowerment. Local oversight is a mechanism to increase the accountability of researchers working abroad: if respect for local authority and tailoring to local context are to be upheld, there must be mechanisms to ensure that research that does not meet these requirements does not proceed. Objections based on the limited oversight capacity in some countries and on concerns related to the politicization of the review process are discussed. Finally, the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the implementation of greater local ethics oversight are laid out.

Keywords

development studies, international development research, research ethics

Introduction

> The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are. It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations.
>
> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* [1].

Failing to consult local stakeholders when conducting research abroad may enable research that runs counter to local understandings of research-related risks. In the area of agricultural biotechnology, Canada is open to genetically modified food commodities and supports research into such modifications. Ethiopia, on the other hand, has taken a precautionary approach, banning all genetic modifications of food crops, as well as research on such modifications [2-4]. Although both countries are signatories to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, they have interpreted and implemented that protocol differently. Examples like this hint at the damage that research could create in a given community when the research is conducted by individuals less familiar with the setting. This is true not only of agriculture and environmental research, but of human participant research as well.

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In this paper, we argue that local ethics approval should be obtained for international development research – meaning approval from authorities in the jurisdiction where the research is conducted, not only where it is proposed or analyzed. While the practice of obtaining local ethics approval is common for health research, it is less common in non-clinical research, including the social sciences, and is a topic that has been subject to limited research [5]. This contrasts sharply with the domain of international clinical research, which has been, and continues to be, abundantly discussed in the research ethics literature.

We consider "international development research" broadly: research that seeks to improve human wellbeing by improving health, knowledge and skills, standards of living, governance, environmental sustainability, security, rights, equity and social justice [6-9]. We are not aware of any systematic studies on the subject, and recognize that practices vary by individual, institution, and discipline. Based on our experiences in international development research and interviews conducted with researchers, there seems to exist a marked tendency in non-clinical research to only consult the research ethics committees (REC) of the researchers' home institutions – often in the economic North, and often within the walls of a university [10]. We believe that this should change. Research institutions, such as universities, and funding agencies should not only establish local country ethics approval as a *de facto* expectation, but should also implement the necessary mechanisms for ensuring that local approval has been obtained when and where possible. Similarly, this expectation should be laid out clearly in internationally-recognized ethics guidelines. Despite widespread habitual demand for research ethics approval, our concern is that there is minimal appreciation and enforcement of it in international development research. The result can be affronts to justice, equity and accountability, and the possibility of significant harm.

In what follows, we explain the critical role of ethics oversight in early detection and prevention of potential harm that can be caused by some international development research. Afterwards, we explore a number of reasons supporting our position, stated above. These include the importance of (a) tailoring research to the local context, (b) respecting local authority, and (c) ensuring mechanisms of accountability. After having outlined these justifications, we discuss some of the challenges to local ethics oversight such as low capacity, politicization, and bias. We do not believe that these challenges reduce the importance of local REC approval as a general principle, and instead propose processes to mitigate these so that transparency and accountability can be fostered.

We fear the lack of literature justifying the importance of local ethics oversight in the context of international development research [5] might leave open the door to two phenomena. First, the minimization of the importance of local oversight, hinging on the assumption that there is a *de facto* lack of risk for (certain types of) international development research (for a parallel exploration of this theme in the social sciences more broadly, see [11,12]). Second, the curtailing of efforts to build capacity to enable local ethics oversight of non-health-related research. To begin our exploration of the phenomena, we sought to draw from the personal experience of three cohorts of international development researchers, a project that led to the creation of the special issue accompanying this article. The case studies assembled highlight some of the structural barriers that international development researchers face when trying to obtain local ethics approval.

The role of research ethics oversight

Our starting point is the recognition of the potential for harm that can result from international development research. Drawing from Mayer's suggestion that development *practice* can be harmful, our respective experiences in the field suggest that *research* into development may likewise have direct or indirect consequences that unintentionally cause harm on multiple levels [13]. Research-related harms are often fostered by power inequalities and vulnerabilities that can cause or enable exploitation [14]. Examples of this on the individual level include qualitative social science research that re-traumatizes interviewees, or the identifiability of opinions and experiences that were meant to be non-attributable to a specific individual [15,16]. At the community and national level, harm can occur on a broader scale, such as when research is used to justify relocating communities for the purposes of large-scale development and investment projects [17].

The primary purpose of RECs is to ensure the protection of research participants against such harms. To accomplish this, RECs try to identify where potential harms may emerge in any given research project and to assess the ensuing risk-benefit ratio of that particular study, while ensuring participants are informed and consent voluntarily to their participation in research [6,18]. Over the past four decades, the research ethics infrastructure has been strengthened globally, and RECs are now present in most countries. However, questions remain about what are the most appropriate frameworks of oversight for research projects that are conducted in other jurisdictions, particularly in the economic South.

Global funders and northern RECs often recognize the importance of local ethics oversight. For example, the Australian Council for International Development states that researchers "should ensure that they are aware of, and follow, any national ethics processes, and relevant ethical review processes through local institutions, and comply with local laws" [19]. The Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) outlines a similar requirement: Article 8.3 states that "research conducted under the auspices of a Canadian research institution and conducted outside its jurisdiction, whether elsewhere in Canada, or outside Canada, shall undergo prior research ethics review by both: the REB [research ethics board] at the Canadian institution under the auspices of which the research is being conducted; and the REB or other responsible review body or bodies, if any, at the research site" [18]. Ng et al. [5] similarly support local REC oversight, arguing that RECs not only be involved in research reviews, but that they also take the leading/coordinating role when more than one REC are involved.

Taking all the above into consideration, and situating it in the context of international development research, we review below some of the primary reasons as to why seeking local research ethics review ought to be seen as the “right” thing to do.

The case for local ethics approval in international development research

There have been decades of debates about what social justice is, and how it ought to be achieved. Rather than delve into these debates, or engage the diversity of opinions of what it entails [see 20-22], we here approach the concept of social justice teleologically: we begin from first principles acknowledged as roots of justice and advocate that they be established and advanced. We deplore that research that is not explicitly about social justice often does not take it into account [23]. Additionally, when it is addressed in a routine fashion, aspects of social justice may be rendered technical, whereby complex issues of social justice are quantified into a limited number of simplistic metrics [2]. Transforming research practices in international development requires changing the minimum standard, and thereby reducing the possibility of injustice, whether in process or in result, intentionally or unintentionally. As such, in the following sub-sections we offer three areas wherein a grounding in social justice warrants justifications for local ethics oversight of international development research. On the social justice spectrum, these three areas are more accommodative (working with the existing system) than transformative (changing the way the system works), and we present them as basic requirements. First, there should be recognition that the perception of what is ethically sound and an appropriate level of risk is not uniform globally, and the positions held by foreign researchers and external RECs ought not to be imposed upon the economic South. Furthermore, sharing the benefits of the research can mean significantly different things for northern RECs granting ethics approval than for local RECs. Opinions about what is and is not acceptable ought to be locally informed [23]. Additionally, bypassing national authority replicates attitudes and practices that disrespect and disempower that authority. Third, external RECs granting approval for research in the economic South provide limited means of accountability. Conversely, local RECs can stipulate monitoring and reporting requirements, while also ensuring researchers act in accordance with national regulations and laws.

Tailoring research to the local context

Local ethics oversight is important because local RECs can assess the risks of harm for proposed projects based upon their own laws, regulations, priorities and context. For example, when researchers obtain ethics approvals from their own institutions (e.g., a Canadian university), they may not operate with the same risk assessment measures as would a local REC. For some components of any given research, local RECs may be in a better position than foreign ones to assess whether the proposed project carries certain risks within that local context. For instance, study protocols drafted by researchers from the economic North may be blind to perceptions of obligation within relationships of power disparities for participants from the economic South, the legacy of colonialism and the unstated assumption of personal gain as a result of participation, all of which can be lost in figurative and literal translation during the research process [14]. In the context of Indigenous research within Canada, which deals with nations within a nation, Stiegman and Castleden have provided a key example of how the researcher’s home institution may not be sensitized to the cultural practices and needs of the local Indigenous context [25]. Additionally, local RECs might be better placed to ensure that benefits are appropriately shared with the people and nation being studied. Examples of this are presented in the case studies included in this special issue [26].

While researchers could mitigate risk without consulting national authorities, who assesses and authorizes the proposed research is itself a component of ethical research. Imposing research or assuming that it is sufficiently low risk or that the risk involved is warranted, without consulting national authorities, is a return to colonial approaches and imperialist attitudes, and the subject of the following subsection. Of course, this is not to say that foreign-based RECs (based at the institutions of international researchers) are unimportant: they ensure proposed studies are in line with researchers’ own institutional and national codes of ethics. In some cases, these codes may be more stringent than local ones.

Respect for local authority: countering colonial attitudes and ethical imperialism

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action emphasize the important role of the nation state in determining its own strategies, priorities and processes. These agreements attempt to address a long-lasting concern within the practice of international development, namely that foreigners direct funding choices and development activity. In addition to shifting the balance of power, these agreements outline mutual accountability as a key principle upon which cooperation and collaboration can occur. These agreements are two examples of efforts towards what we consider to be arrangements reflective of more just relationships. It is possible to translate these steps from the donor and development practice realm into that of research by adopting different operating definitions of terms (e.g., accountability for international development donors tends to be financial, whereas we refer to accountability in research as being much broader).

Respect for local authority is also an antidote for a larger power phenomenon that may not be directly expressed but is present by its overshadowing consequences. Colonialist practices are based on power relations inherited from colonial relations, regardless of whether there is an actual colonial history between the particular countries or groups involved [27]. Colonial relations involve power relations resulting from the global and local politics of postcolonial realities. Indigenous and postcolonialist scholars have argued that research practices have allowed the powerful colonizers to view themselves as morally superior and “civilized” by studying and categorizing the colonized as the “Other” in a process of objectification and dehumanization [1,25]. From a social justice-oriented postcolonial perspective, researchers or research teams associated with institutions from the economic North doing field work in the economic South must be cognizant of the risk of replicating colonialist practices. Colonialism and imperialism have deep-rooted historical legacies, and the predominant attitudes and practices continue into the present. When one nation imposes its perspective upon another by virtue of its greater economic or military power, concerns of justice arise. In international development research, these concerns should arise when foreign researchers and external RECs determine alone what level of risk is deemed acceptable for local populations. When RECs based in the economic North determine ethical issues on behalf of local stakeholders, they promote the trope that this responsibility and authority is “rightfully” theirs. We find this deeply problematic.

When local ethics oversight capacity has been formally established but is not sought, we must confront the possibility that colonialist attitudes persist and are being replicated. Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has emphasized the connection between research and European colonialism in the Indigenous context, describing “research” as a dirty word in Indigenous vocabulary, one that conjures bad memories and distrust due to past unethical research practices [1]. Researchers may disagree with either position in the example we gave at the start of this article about the differences between the Canadian and Ethiopian positions on the genetic modification of crops. However, conducting research in spite of that knowledge, or, possibly worse, believing it unimportant to bother asking for permission first, replicates paternalistic and colonialist practices.

Ensuring that local RECs approve research is one essential step towards consciously and systemically avoiding the replication of harmful colonial attitudes – regardless of whether those RECs employ different considerations than the RECs of the foreign researchers’ home institutions. Denying a less powerful or less economically advantaged country the right to implement its own governing systems are practices that we ought to oppose on principle as being unjust. Submitting to a local REC is to acknowledge and respect the local authority that governs the environment in which one is operating and, as such, is taking a stance against our shared colonial history.

Providing mechanisms to enforce accountability

Accountability refers to the obligation of a person or an entity to “account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner” [28]. We believe that international development researchers have a responsibility and an obligation to be accountable to the countries in which their research is conducted and to the people with or on whom their research is conducted. It is insufficient for a REC to grant the researcher approval for a research project based in another country, because the oversight and ability of that REC to follow up may be very limited in that other jurisdiction. This is an ethical as well as a legal argument, and it is tied to the former two arguments of respect for local authority and tailoring to local context. If respect for local authority and tailoring to local context are to be upheld, there must be mechanisms to enforce accountability at the local level.

Within the field of international development, far too little consideration has been given to the concepts of responsibility and accountability [29]. For example, while in theory informed consent forms provide the relevant contact information, this information may be of little use to participants, as they may face any number of barriers in using that information, such as lacking the resources to make an international call, lacking access to emails, or lacking the required technical literacy level needed to send a complaint electronically. Scholars have observed the difficulties that can arise in accessing mechanisms for accountability and legal redress for negative effects caused by development assistance [30]. Similarly, forms of legal redress for harms caused by international development research may be limited or difficult to pursue. RECs in the home institutions of researchers have the authority to take some punitive measures against a researcher (i.e., terminating a study early) when found to be in breach of research ethics principles. But the mechanisms for accountability are much more limited when research is conducted abroad, particularly given the potential limitations of research participants and host communities to enter in communication with the proper authorities. In contrast, local ethics oversight might provide more easily accessible means of communication for participants, and therefore access to recourse. As such, local RECs have the potential to offer a mechanism to hold researchers responsible if the research causes harm, to help countries and institutions keep track of the research that is being conducted under their jurisdiction, and to ensure that research results are reported back to host communities.

As mentioned above, accountability includes the obligation to disclose results in a transparent manner. Accountability means that researchers must also meet expectations with regard to transparency and sharing of benefits resulting from the research. The Declaration of Helsinki, which guides biomedical research, states that those involved in a study are entitled to be informed of its outcomes and to share any benefits that result from it (Article 33). The Canadian TCPS2 adds that sharing of results should be done in a “culturally appropriate and meaningful format” [18]. Similarly, Indigenous scholars have argued that Indigenous research methodologies require research to be disseminated back to its people in a culturally appropriate manner “as part of an ethical and respectful approach” [1]. Universities and funding agencies may require that participants have access to the research results, but the implementation of plans is “often left to the researchers’ goodwill and discretion” [29]. As the Ethiopian case study of this special issue shows, when national research ethics approval is sought, authorities can make approval conditional to the sharing of results and the maintenance of regular communication between researchers and authorities [26]. While this leaves some questions unanswered (e.g., how dissemination costs would be covered), oversight by local RECs provides a means through which national authorities can ensure that the nation wherein research takes place, and the people with/on whom research is conducted, have access to the results and share in the benefits.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine how much or how little of the obtained knowledge and benefits ought to be shared; rather, we wish to highlight that national authorities are better positioned (both pragmatically and from a social justice perspective) to make these assessments and enforce these principles in appropriate and effective ways than are foreign-based RECs. That is not to say that the later must not play a role. But often, there may be a tendency to emphasize procedures that may appear to be more for the protection of the institution or the researcher than the local participants. Thus, part of our argument is that we must shift the power inherent to ethics oversight so that decision-making rests first and foremost with local stakeholders.

Special considerations

In arguing for local ethics oversight, some circumstances make it such that approval for research is impossible to obtain (e.g., lack of local capacity in a given research area, absence of any local REC) or may result in objectively crucial and timely research being denied based on biases or for political reasons [31]. Similarly, ongoing oversight may also prove challenging. Even when research designs are sound and informed consent is reflective of the activities that are planned, the implementation of any given study may differ significantly from the protocol, particularly in the field – an issue of concern that is not limited to that which is conducted in the economic South. Like others, Benator holds that "inadequate attention is paid to monitoring studies, trying to improve the actual conduct of research, and to promoting justice in the distribution of the burdens and benefits of research" [14].

These challenges are valid and they are important [32,33]. However, we see them as illustrations of the possibility to acknowledge special considerations through the case-by-case application of the general principle of local ethics oversight in international development research. We are not aware of any systematic assessment of the degree to which challenges of the nature we explore below are encountered.

1. Local ethics oversight capacity

The infrastructure of local ethics oversight may be significantly less established in some jurisdictions, or may be entirely absent [34]. Communications with and instructions from the local REC may be delayed, infrequent or inconsistent. Requirements for obtaining ethics approval may not always be straightforward, readily accessible, or easy to comprehend – the case studies in this special issue demonstrate how challenging obtaining information about local RECs can be. In some cases, it may even be difficult simply to determine whether a local REC exists, and therefore if there is a requirement to obtain approval for one's research [34]. Furthermore, RECs may lack the enforcement capacity to take action on foreign researchers who do not follow their requirements. This may lead to temptation to forego the REC process altogether. Avoiding a legal requirement because of a country's underdeveloped infrastructure not only perpetuates low capacity and undermines legitimacy, but it also jeopardizes research activities by exposing them to early termination, for instance. It is also important to note that even when local RECs appear dysfunctional, other mechanisms may exist to ensure a minimal oversight of research activities. For instance, some nations require researchers to obtain special visas to conduct research [35].

Generally speaking, having to deal with capacity challenges of local RECs comes with the package of working in international development research. However frustrating these issues may be, researchers who voluntarily choose to work in this field ought not to use these frustrations as justifications for bypassing local ethics approval requirements.

2. Biases and politicization of local ethics oversight

It is important to note that a local REC may not necessarily act in the interest of all people in a nation. Some may feel that many government institutions, possibly some national RECs, represent only the dominant governing elite's interests at the expense of marginalized populations and continue to act with colonialist practices and paternalistic attitudes – or in direct violation of human rights or basic research ethics principles. While this may be the case in some places, such instances need to be explored in detailed, country-specific analyses that highlight the unique contexts in which formal institutions have lost their legitimacy due to failures to protect citizens. Such breakdowns in legitimacy are the exception rather than the norm and, as such, do not undermine our overall promotion of local ethics oversight.

Another related concern is where researchers may face situations where a local REC is reluctant to approve specific research on a politically sensitive or controversial topic that is not favourable to the governing interests in power. This is particularly relevant for human rights research. For example, a research project studying the experiences of homosexual men in a country where homosexuality is criminalized may be confronted with additional obstacles or even dangers – including risk to participants' safety – if approval is sought from the local REC. Clandestine or covert research of this nature can result in imprisonment and must not be taken lightly [26]. The decision should be informed, deliberate and carefully considered – to the point where it would be seen as justified by an impartial REC. The decision ought to be based on values of human rights, human dignity, and equality. In no case should it ever be made out of pure convenience or as a result of adopting a paternalistic attitude. To be clear, we are not advocating that the existence of exceptions allows individual researchers to pick and choose when they wish to follow local ethics oversight procedures. Rather, if a strong case can be made to forego local ethics oversight, it must be approved as being so by an impartial REC known to take the requirement of local ethics oversight seriously.

But researchers should not stop there. An additional step is to partner with a local research institution or to team up with experienced local researchers, whenever possible. True partnerships may offer additional legitimacy to research projects critical of the dominant local discourse, and alleviate impressions of the North meddling in the local country's affairs [36], while allowing for deeper consideration of the contextual specificity that a local REC would have considered in its assessment of a project. However, it is important to keep in mind that local research partners may be more at risk of persecution from the dominant local elite than might be a foreign researcher. A proper balance must be struck between the safety of the local research team and the principle of local oversight.

Putting it into practice: Roles and responsibilities

The third section of this article presents ways that local ethics oversight can be made a basic requirement of all international development research. This section recognizes that in order for this expectation to become standard, multiple changes are required. We propose the following clarifications of roles and responsibilities for the purpose of discussion, and as potential means by which the local oversight requirement could become a standard practice.

Researchers

Researchers need to be observant of the potential manifestations of injustice, colonialist practices, and paternalistic attitudes in their research practices. Being self-reflective and critical is an essential aspect of being an ethical researcher because RECs (local or foreign) rely upon researchers both to observe rules and guidelines and to identify problematic areas when they emerge so that adjustments to study procedures and behaviours can be made. Second, as we have argued in this article, researchers should seek to measure their plans and practices against the three principles: local risk-benefit analysis, respect for local authority and accountability. It is not the researcher's responsibility alone, but each individual, group, and institution that is a stakeholder in a research project plays a key role in the transition to more just research practice. Researchers also have a responsibility to ensure they are abiding by the correct procedures and according to the laws and regulations of the country wherein the research takes place.

Besides obtaining any required approval from local RECs, researchers should also comply with all other forms of requirements as outlined by the nation within which they intend to conduct research, including obtaining the correct type of visa and other processes. This relates to the nation's right to be informed of, and regulate, research conducted within its borders.

Research institutions, including universities

Home institutions have the power (and obligation) to require that local ethics oversight be taken seriously. Institutions should thus move beyond having local REC approval be a box to be ticked off within a checklist (when it is) and should instead implement a process where documentary proof of the local REC approval is required to be submitted. In other words, research institutions should play a more active role in stringently ensuring that local REC approval has been obtained and will be followed. If local REC approval has not been obtained, institutions should require a documented explanation of why this is the case. In order to support researchers with this process, and avoid frustration and delays, the proof of local REC approval should be clearly communicated at the earliest stage, so that the step does not emerge as an unknown requirement when submitting for ethics review. This is particularly important for graduate students and early career researchers who have less experience with international research procedures and processes, and who may be more constrained by unchangeable timelines.

Beyond an accountability exercise, institutions may be able to assist with this process by compiling a database of the ethics approval requirements of different countries as a resource, perhaps developed with a network of research institutions. Furthermore, institutions may also move towards increased recognition of the validity of the oversight provided by local RECs by putting in place mechanisms to expedite review of protocols already locally approved. Institutions can also facilitate the exchange of information about the conduct of studies in international settings by developing resources such as repositories of submitted protocols, an approach that has been shown to be viable [36].

National government and local research ethics oversight bodies

For the purposes of efficiency for all parties, all countries would facilitate better practice by assigning clear legal mandates to an agency, or agencies, to act as RECs. The clarity of authority, and the process for granting approval, benefits both local authorities and foreign researchers, since it ensures that the latter obtain their approvals if they meet the standard requirements. This legal clarity reinforces the seriousness of local approval. We recognize that there will continue to be challenges of biases and politicization, but working with a developing system is one of the key means for its improvement. The case study from Tanzania [35], about the clarity of the ethics review process hosted by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, is a good example of how some countries are actively working to clarify their requirements and establish legal consequences for those who neglect to respect such laws. In addition, for the capacity of local RECs to reach the potential described in this paper, national governments need to sufficiently resource RECs to ensure their capacity is at a level appropriate to manage ethics review, which may include lobbying domestically for additional resources and establishing partnerships internationally.

Conclusions

There is strong cause for critical reflection about entrenched bias, presuppositions, and power relations within research practice [38]. These concerns are well-documented in the global health research ethics literature, and possible solutions have been proposed, such as increased engagement of host communities [27,39]. However, outside the realm of health research, the relevance of these concerns have received far less attention from the research ethics community itself, despite the fact that non-health research can also have serious ethical implications. We recognize that these issues are not limited to international development research, but the objective of this article narrows the focus to this realm.

This paper has argued that local REC approval should become a minimum standard of practice in international development research. We have presented three justifications for why this is the case, each with the objective of moving toward a more comprehensive and consistent system that advances ethical practices in international development research. First, local ethics oversight helps tailor research projects to the local context, taking into consideration the particular local conditions, as well as helping to balance the distribution of benefits. Second, recognizing the legitimacy of local ethics oversight sends a strong signal against colonialist practices and attitudes inherited from the colonial legacy, even when it may feel bureaucratic and/or is difficult to navigate. Finally, it is a mechanism to empower local authorities and further protect local research participants: by providing local authorities with the knowledge about ongoing studies within their jurisdiction, it allows them to enhance accountability, while also making it more accessible for local research participants to seek recourse or inquiry regarding any possible harmful consequences. The duty to comply with all local REC requirements continues to remain the responsibility of the researcher, as well as, we argue, the researcher's home institution. Researchers are not absolved of this duty by the mere fact that the approval process may be unpleasantly complicated, difficult or bureaucratic. While this article was founded upon a position of social justice, the recommendations have focused upon the basic and immediate requirements of change, rather than the aspired ideal (we can consider that there are levels of social justice: the immediately attainable and the long-term aspiration). Our objective in doing so is to move the direction of international development research practice forward, raising the bar of what is acceptable and thereby decreasing the potential for harm and injustice.

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Conflicts of Interest
Renaud Boulanger is an Executive editor of the journal. He was not involved in the evaluation or review of this manuscript.

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G Song. *Can J Bioeth / Rev Can Bioeth*. 2018, 1(1):17-20

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Guyana – How Do You Know Where to Get the Information You Need? Determining Ethics Approval Requirements in a Developing Country

Gloria Song[1,2]

Résumé
Déterminer le processus d'obtention d'une approbation éthique pour une recherche au niveau local, ou savoir si une telle exigence existe, n'est pas toujours simple dans le contexte de certains pays en développement où une telle information peut être difficile d'accès pour les chercheurs de l'étranger. Dans quelle(s) mesure(s) les obligations éthiques d'un chercheur s'étendent-elles pour déterminer si l'approbation éthique pour une recherche locale est nécessaire, et quelle forme devrait-elle avoir (par exemple, un comité d'éthique institutionnel ou centralisé)? En d'autres termes, est-il attendu d'un chercheur qu'il obtienne une approbation éthique au niveau local, en particulier lorsque ces informations ne sont pas disponibles? Cette étude de cas décrit les étapes que j'ai suivies en tant que chercheure principale, avant de pouvoir raisonnablement conclure qu'aucune exigence d'approbation éthique nationale n'existait au Guyana pour mes recherches. Celles-ci impliquaient d'interviewer des agents de l'ordre sur la mise en œuvre de la Loi sur les violences domestiques au Guyana. S'appuyant sur cette expérience, je discute de diverses considérations qu'un chercheur en développement international doit garder à l'esprit lors de la planification et de la conduite de la recherche afin de répondre aux principales normes internationales de recherche.

Mots clés
loi, genre, éthique de la recherche, pays en développement, accès à l'information, développement international

Abstract
Determining the process for obtaining local research ethics approval, or whether such a requirement even exists, may not always be straightforward in the context of some developing countries where such information may not be easily accessible to overseas researchers. How far do a researcher's ethical obligations extend in determining whether there is a requirement for local research ethics approval, and what form this would take (e.g., institutional or centralised ethics review)? In other words, how far should a researcher be expected to go in seeking out local ethics approval, especially where such information is not readily available? As part of this discussion, this case study describes the steps that I took as the principal researcher, before I was able to reasonably conclude that no national ethics approval requirement existed in Guyana for my particular research, which involved interviewing justice service providers about the implementation of Guyana's Domestic Violence Act. Drawing on this experience, I discuss various considerations that an international development researcher should bear in mind when planning and conducting research that seeks to meet leading international norms of research ethics.

Keywords
law, gender, research ethics, developing countries, access to information, international development

Introduction

Researchers from developed countries may be accustomed to having access to well-established research ethics procedures and resources (i.e., clear national guidelines and research ethics boards at their host institution). But how does a researcher go about obtaining local research ethics approval in a developing country where they plan to conduct research involving human participants?

It is important to recognize that conducting research in a developing country can be challenging, especially when dealing with a different cultural context that may have very limited resources and an underdeveloped infrastructure. Furthermore, the process for obtaining local research ethics approval in a developing country may not always be straightforward. Even simply determining whether there exists a requirement to obtain approval from a local research ethics body may be difficult. This situation presents a related dilemma: where it is difficult to determine the local ethics approval process requirements, do international development researchers still have an ethical obligation to obtain local ethics approval from the appropriate national body in the country of research?

The main article for this special issues makes the case for obtaining local ethics approval when conducting field research in a developing country [1]. At the very minimum, researchers must satisfy themselves as to whether a local ethics approval requirement exists. This case study further expands on this argument by examining scenarios where it is not easy to determine whether there is a local requirement to obtain ethics approval in the country of research.

This case study recounts efforts to determine whether there was such a research ethics approval requirement in Guyana, a small Caribbean country located on the northern shore of South America. This research project was conducted as part of the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) research award program. The objective of the research project was to use an anti-essentialist feminist legal theory framework to study the implementation of Guyana's Domestic Violence Act, by conducting case law research and interviewing various justice service providers, including lawyers, the judiciary, and women's organizations, about their experiences and observations of the protection order application process that is provided by the law. As such, the nature of the research was both based in legal studies and the social sciences.

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A personal narrative approach has been used as the format for this case study. Narratives and the act of telling stories are a powerful tool frequently used by feminist legal scholars [1], as well as the related fields of critical race theory [2] and queer legal theory [3], recounting both personal experiences as well as experiences of others dealing with the subject matter firsthand. The use of narratives serve many crucial purposes, including bringing to light experiences that may often not be discussed publicly in order to make abstract claims more tangible [4] and to challenge stereotypes [5]. Personal narratives challenge the notions of scientific rationality prevailing in our society that "privileges universality, statistical significance, and logical deductions as ways of knowing about the world" by presenting experiences as "a way of knowing that should occupy a respected, or in some cases a privileged position, in analysis and argumentation" [4]. The theoretical framework used for this research project, anti-essentialist feminist legal theory, particularly emphasizes the need to prioritize the voices of those going through the experience [6], in recognition of the feminist principle that the personal is political. Although I do not claim to speak on behalf of marginalized voices in this particular context, given the useful purpose that narratives can provide, I present my personal experience in going through the process of determining whether there was a local ethics approval process.

Case Presentation

As the principal researcher, I used a number of methods and sources to explore what, if any, national research ethics approval requirements existed in Guyana for my research, including correspondence with a regional bioethics organization, other researchers, Guyanese government offices, and the Guyanese High Commission. The research project had gone through an ethics approval process with the IDRC's Advisory Committee on Research Ethics, as is required by IDRC's research award program. However, in international development research, it is important to also obtain ethics approval from the appropriate local research ethics body in the country being researched, if there is such a legal requirement and if research ethics infrastructure is present [7]. As such, I set out to determine whether there was such a requirement in Guyana.

An initial web search using search terms such as "Guyana", "research" and "ethics" in varying forms did not produce any answers as to whether Guyana had an ethics requirement for this type of legal and social science research, interviewing justice service providers and researching laws. Many countries limit requirements for research ethics review to biomedical research. I therefore contacted several other sources.

One source was the Bioethics Society of the English-Speaking Caribbean, which aims to "increase knowledge and understanding of bioethics through promoting and fostering deliberations across the English-speaking Caribbean" [8]. The Society informed me by email that ethics review in Guyana is conducted by the ethics committee at the Ministry of Health, and recommended that I contact the Chief Medical Officer for Guyana. The Chief Medical Officer's office did not respond to my email inquiry. The Chief Medical Officer's email address was the only contact information that had been provided. It is plausible that with sustained effort, other forms of contact may have been discovered, such as phone, fax, or regular mail. However, I opted not to further pursue this line because the advice did not appear to be correct. Although the Society's recommendation was understandable in light of its focus on bioethics, it seemed unlikely to me that the proposed legal and social science research would necessarily fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, as health is a separate ministerial jurisdiction from legal affairs and social sciences.

I then consulted with researchers who had previously conducted field research in Guyana. One researcher from the social science field had recently opted not to seek local ethics approval from the Guyanese authorities, because the researcher had perceived there to be safety concerns in doing so, due to the controversial nature of their research topic. Such decisions are of course difficult to make, and not all researchers may agree on when such a decision may be justified. For further discussion on what to consider when deciding whether to forgo local ethics approval, please refer to the main article in the thematic issue "The Case for Local Ethics Oversight in International Development Research" [7].

Another researcher had recently completed her doctoral research on the Makushi Amerindians' perceptions on environmental education in Guyana [9] and as a result had been required to obtain approval from the ministry responsible for the environment and the ministry responsible for Indigenous peoples. It therefore seemed logical that I would have to consult with the relevant government ministries, likely the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Ministry of Social Protection.

To follow up on this particular lead, I sought to contact the relevant government ministries in Guyana. This process involved numerous and repeated phone calls in an attempt to connect to the relevant body. The website for the Ministry of Social Protection appeared to not be operational, but contact information for the Ministry was available through the Guyana High Commission's website located in London, United Kingdom [10]. I telephoned the Ministry of Social Protection, and was referred to the Women's Affairs Bureau. After a few telephone calls, the Women's Affairs Bureau referred me back to the Director of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Protection. With many more phone calls, I was finally able to connect with the Director, who explained over the phone that no government approval would be required to conduct my research, unless I wished to interview someone from the government department. In that case, the request would have to go through the department secretary. In an ideal situation, best practices dictate that written confirmation should be obtained; however, it is important to note that this may not always be possible in a developing country context where even reaching an official by telephone may be near impossible, as was noted in this particular case.

Another resource was the Guyana High Commission located in Ottawa, Canada. The High Commission staff responded to my email inquiry approximately one month later, advising me to ask the Ministry of Legal Affairs. I sent an email to the office, and followed up approximately two weeks later with several phone calls, when I was referred to a staff member in the Ministry of Legal Affairs. The staff member promised to look into the question of whether approval would be required. Two weeks later, I followed up with the Ministry of Legal Affairs, and the same staff member advised that she had confirmed that no approval would be required to conduct the research, unless I intended to question anyone from within the Ministry.

I therefore concluded that there did not appear to be one overarching research ethics approval body in Guyana, as is the case in many developing countries. Instead, ethics approval may be required for particular types of research falling within the jurisdiction of particular government ministries, such as health, environment, or Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, if research was to involve speaking with staff members of a government department, the researcher should request permission from the department, although this requirement did not appear to be for the purpose of ensuring that research ethics standards were met, so much as for control of the type of research that would be permitted in that department.

Learning from experience: Considerations for determining local research ethics approval requirements

Detail has been provided in describing this process in order to demonstrate that local research ethics requirements may not always be easy to determine, particularly in developing countries where the governing infrastructure may have limited resources. Information about such requirements may not be easily accessible for researchers from abroad. Despite this, it is still important to determine whether there are local ethics requirements in the country being researched, for ethical reasons relating to justice [7]. As such, it is useful to be resourceful and explore creative strategies for finding the answer.

Such strategies also require adapting to the various ways that other cultural contexts may operate. In Canada, for example, people are used to having information available online and regularly use email as a reliable form of communication. From a legal perspective, it may very well be preferable to receive such information in writing in order to confirm one’s understanding of the communication and to keep as a record of proof. However, the reality is that online communication may not be the dominant method in some work cultures. In some developing contexts, an office may not have the required resources to use email on a regular basis. As such, a researcher may have to use various methods of contact.

Researchers should also pay attention to the sources that they consult when determining whether a local research ethics approval requirement exists. For example, it may be helpful to ask other researchers who have dealt with that particular country; however, it is not enough to rely on their information alone. Ideally, researchers will want to confirm their understanding with the appropriate government authority, where possible.

Finally, patience and persistence are also required. At all times, researchers should remain respectfully cognizant of the fact that government offices in developing regions may be working with limited resources, have competing high pressure priorities and deadlines, and have other legitimate reasons for not immediately responding to the researcher’s inquiries. A lack of response from an office does not necessarily absolve researchers of their duty to exercise due diligence in determining whether an ethics approval requirement (and system) exists. The onus remains on the researcher to ensure that all and any ethics approval requirements met, in addition to those of their own host institution. Repeated follow-up to initial inquiries is recommended, and if one method of communication is not successful, the researcher may wish to try a different form. And it is important to recognize that this process may take some time.

Ultimately, I was able to go through the proper channels of authorization to interview Guyanese government officials, thanks to the Canadian High Commission in Guyana, who graciously provided valuable assistance in setting up these interviews. The Canadian High Commission, or embassies in a given country, may therefore serve as a valuable resource for questions that a researcher may have regarding local research ethics requirements.

Questions to consider

- How far should a researcher go (i.e., due diligence) to determine whether there is (and respond to) a requirement for local research ethics approval? At what point does one stop and conclude that there are none?
- What resources can a researcher use to determine whether there are local research ethics approval requirements?
- What resources should be considered as reliable authorities (e.g., government agencies, international associations) for determining local research ethics requirements?
- What is the role of the researchers’ host institution research ethics body (such as Research Ethics Boards in Canada) in this context?

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Responsible Access to Data in International Field Research: A Case Study from Tanzania

Gussai H. Sheikheldin[1]

Résumé
Cette étude de cas relate l'expérience de l'auteur pour obtenir l'approbation en éthique de la recherche des autorités locales en Tanzanie. Elle met en évidence les exigences supplémentaires relatives à l'obtention d'un visa rencontrées par un chercheur étranger en Tanzanie. Bien que cette démarche soit distincte du processus d'approbation éthique en soi, elle fait partie des prérequis à la conduite responsable de la recherche (CRR) afin de respecter les lois et procédures en vigueur dans le pays hôte. Le récit démontre que deux étapes, séparées mais complémentaires, doivent être complétées pour accéder de façon responsable aux données sur le terrain : l'examen local de l'éthique de la recherche et l'obtention d'un visa adéquat. À titre de comparaison, un exemple "d'accès irresponsable" aux données est présenté et les conséquences de cette pratique sont exposées.

Mots clés
données, accès, éthique de la recherche, visa, conduite responsable de la recherche, Tanzanie

Abstract
This case study illustrates the author's narrative of his experience obtaining local research ethics approval in Tanzania. It highlights the additional requirements a foreign researcher in Tanzania can encounter with visa approval which is a separate process from research ethics approval. While fulfilling the visa requirements may not be directly related to the ethical administration of research per se, it is part of the responsible conduct of research (RCR) which, among others, includes respect for the local laws and procedures of the host country. The narrative shows that a responsible access to field data in such cases requires fulfilling two separate but complimentary processes: local research ethics review and proper visa attainment. Further, an example of an 'irresponsible' access to data is also presented for comparison and examination of the consequences.

Keywords
data, access, research ethics, visa, responsible conduct of research, Tanzania

Introduction

This case study article is a personal narrative of the process of attaining local research ethics approval in Tanzania. It illustrates an example of separate but complementary steps of obtaining all the necessary paperwork in international development field research work conducted by foreign researchers, and how such steps are connected from a research ethics perspective.

Between December 2014 and June 2016, I spent 12 months in Tanzania conducting field research. The study was on agents of technological change (or technological development) in Tanzania, which are organizations that are active in processes of diffusing, supporting and adapting new technological solutions for developing communities. Due to the wide scope of this study, it was divided into two phases that were carried out by the same researcher. One at the rural level explored social enterprises that diffuse technology products and services. Social enterprises are forms of organizations that combine social mission with business rigour (i.e., not charitable or philanthropic but also not mainly for-profit), such as delivering renewable energy to off-grid or developing rural communities through affordable payment deals. The other phase, at the national level, investigated policy reform agenda for a number of public technology intermediaries (PTIs), organizations that belong to the state apparatus but operate autonomously (also known as R&D parastatals). PTIs conduct research and development activities on innovative technological solutions to development challenges that can improve local technological capabilities of Tanzanian industries [1]. Both phases of the study collected data from various parts of the country, from off-grid rural communities to ministries and academic institutions in urban areas. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews and direct field observations by the researcher, through a comparative case study strategy [2]. Secondary data involved national and organizational reports about the state of productivity and technological demands in the agricultural, energy and industrial Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) sectors of Tanzania. The research tried to determine whether social enterprises can be effective agents of technological change in rural regions, and whether some institutional reform agenda can revamp Tanzania's PTIs to be more innovative.

Ethics review process and visa approval

As a university-associated study from Canada, (then based at the University of Guelph), I was required to submit an application for research ethics review to my university Research Ethics Board (REB), which approved my research proposal. As a standard procedure, the REB required us to clarify whether there were ethics review requirements in Tanzania, and if these existed, we had to comply with local requirements before beginning field activities. We found that in Tanzania, all research conducted in Mainland Tanzania (excluding Zanzibar) by foreign principal investigators, whether as individuals or associated with institutes, required a clearance from the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). To receive clearance, ethics review applications must be submitted to COSTECH. It has a year-round application window. After reviewing applications, along with supporting documents such as the researcher(s)' credentials and their affiliations, and the purpose of the study, the

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verdict is communicated back to the researcher who can then obtain the official 'research permit' from COSTECH. Whether the research includes human subjects or the study of local flora and fauna, COSTECH receives ethics review applications and channels them through appropriate reviewers who can assess them according to their specialty and content [3]. I obtained my local research permit that was valid for one year and extended after another year using the above-mentioned process. Upon the conclusion of the study, COSTECH requests that researchers share the general findings with them, in any suitable format (e.g., a publication, a technical report, etc.), for their records of Tanzania-related studies.

Soon after obtaining the research permit from COSTECH, the researcher should apply to the Immigration Department of Tanzania Ministry of Home Affairs to receive a temporary residence visa for researchers. While COSTECH approves the ethical criteria of research itself, it is the ministry of Home Affairs that approves the residency of the researcher (in that capacity) in Tanzania.

Responsible access to data as a part of the responsible conduct of research (RCR)

For a foreign researcher to access local data in an ethical manner, it is not enough to go through local research ethics review (COSTECH) in the host country. An additional step is required to comply with national laws, which is to attain a specific visa type for foreign researchers in order to respect the local laws of legal residency. Therefore, a responsible access to data by fulfilling both processes, constitutes a key element for a responsible conduct of research (RCR).

Defined as "the practice of scientific investigation with integrity" [4], RCR is generally a set of principles that guide researchers so that their practice is comprehensively ethical [5,6]. Comprehensiveness here means that researchers can be sure to have behaved in an ethically responsible manner regarding not only the technical aspects of the research but also the contingencies surrounding their work. Principles of RCR include the basic research ethics principles of honesty, objectivity and confidentiality, as well as related principles such as respect for the law and respect for research participants [5,6]. In the current context, skipping one or both processes, whether local research ethics approval or proper residency status, would constitute a research misconduct that is a violation of RCR, as will be illustrated in the example below.

An example of an irresponsible access to data

During my field research in Tanzania I interviewed senior staff from COSTECH as well as from the Ministry of Education (to which COSTECH reports), and some of the respondents revealed to me that, in some cases, foreign researchers choose to skip the COSTECH research ethics review altogether and conduct their field research anyway. Some examples included wildlife scientists who entered Tanzania with visitor visas that gave them a 90 day stay in the country. During this time, they apparently took multiple safari and game tours to some of Tanzania's renowned national parks, and while on those tours they conducted their field research activities, including the research on small samples of flora and fauna. The respondents informed me that COSTECH was able to identify a number of such occurrences when the researchers later published the results of their studies in journals or volumes that reached COSTECH's attention. COSTECH research staff were interested to see that such studies took place in Tanzania without them having any records of those studies, at which point they could conclude that research permits were never issued. Whether they received ethics approval from their home institutions remains unknown. Besides being on the highly questionable ethically and legally, these occurrences harm Tanzania's own research networks and interests in several ways, including:

- Devaluing local knowledge reservoirs by undermining the local record keeping of relevant research conducted within the country. For example, the knowledge attained from such field studies could have perhaps benefited Tanzania's own efforts at wildlife conservation, if they knew about it in proper time and format.
- Denying COSTECH resources that could have been used to support local development agenda, since the fees paid for local ethics reviews are a source of revenue for COSTECH which in turn invests them in fostering the science, technology and innovation capacity of Tanzania.
- Disserving Tanzanian local researchers who may have been conducting similar research and would lose their opportunity to publish their results on international platforms due to the 'sneaky' performance of those foreign researchers. That is at least unfair.

Access to data was, in these cases, irresponsible. It was not sanctioned by local laws and research ethics oversight. Even if these researchers obtained some form of ethical review from their home institutions, their failure to obtain local approval (ethics and visa) was a violation of RCR. Thus, in order to face this kind of problem, COSTECH has been seeking from the government the mandate to legally pursue, inside and outside Tanzania, foreign researchers who fail to obtain research permits before conducting field research activities in Tanzania.

Questions to Consider

1. Whom should be held accountable when local ethics norms are violated by a foreign researcher? The researchers themselves, their institution(s), or the journal that published the researcher's study results and did not check whether their study met local ethics standards?

2. Can there be alternative ways of thinking about fulfilling both ethics and visa requirements for foreign researchers through a unified procedure? Would an ‘enhanced’ application procedure that combines both, to be handled by a single reporting station, be a beneficial arrangement for local authorities and foreign researchers, or would it present another set of problems?
3. How could we ultimately implement proper procedures to prevent foreign research projects from harming local research interests?

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Nepal Health Research Council Paves Path to Ethical Research Processes

Sunisha Neupane[1], Chaitali Sinha[2]

Résumé

Cette étude de cas décrit un processus d'approbation éthique lors d'un projet de recherche sur la santé maternelle au Népal. Le gouvernement du Népal a créé le Conseil de recherches en santé du Népal (NHRC) en 1991, ainsi que le Comité scientifique et d'éthique qui examine la recherche sur la santé. Cependant, tous les chercheurs ne demandent pas d'approbation éthique. Bien que les chercheurs prétendent un manque de clarté sur les types d'études nécessitant une approbation, les auteurs soutiennent que les lignes directrices sont suffisamment claires si elles sont explorées et suivies. Les incohérences dans la recherche de l'approbation éthique de la NHRC pourraient simplement signifier que les chercheurs ne sont pas conscients du processus d'examen éthique. Peut-être que les directives ne sont pas strictement appliquées. Néanmoins, en tant que chercheurs, il nous appartient de demander l'approbation éthique par principe, sans considérer celle-ci comme un obstacle à la recherche.

Mots clés

recherche sur le développement, évaluation éthique de la recherche, recherche en santé, Népal

Abstract

This case study outlines an ethics approval process experienced during a maternal health research project in Nepal. The Government of Nepal established the Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) in 1991, along with the Scientific and Ethics Committee reviewing health related research. However, not all researchers apply for ethics approval. Although researchers may claim a lack of clarity on the kinds of research studies needing approval, the authors argue that the guidelines are sufficiently clear if explored and duly followed. The inconsistencies in seeking ethics approval from NHRC could simply mean that researchers are not aware of this ethical review process. Perhaps the guidelines are not strictly enforced. Nevertheless, as researchers it is our responsibility to seek ethical approval as a matter of principle, without considering it a barrier to research.

Keywords

development research, research ethics review, health research, Nepal

Introduction

Public health and health systems research has gained a tremendous interest in low and middle-income countries. The Canadian *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2), Article 8.3 states that: "any research involving humans shall obtain necessary approvals from both the research ethics board (REB) at the Canadian institution under the auspices of which the research is being conducted and the REB at the research site" [1]. However, much work is required to ensure that the ethical dimensions are examined, and that the ethical processes and responsibilities are undertaken, when conducting research and when sharing research results in low and middle-income countries [2,3]. An ethical review of a health research study in a host country considers the national and cultural context, and adds valuable perspectives from host researchers and ethicists [3]. A national REB can ensure that a research project benefits the host country and the communities where the research is to be conducted. Unfortunately, results from research studies conducted by researchers from foreign institutions are not always shared with the participants, and the requirement for this is still a grey area [4,5]. Sharing results with participants fall under principle of respect for persons [4,5] and a national ethics approval process can potentially clarify such a requirement and suggest in-country knowledge translation approaches. A national REB could further contribute towards tracking studies and gathering results across different research projects conducted in the country. It is, therefore, crucial that host countries are able to develop robust ethics approval processes to provide guidance to researchers, protect local communities, and track the range of different research studies being conducted over time. It is equally important that researchers actively seek and meaningfully engage in the process of acquiring a national ethics approval where they wish to conduct the research. Yet, studies are still being conducted without formal ethics approval from the host countries [3]. Teijlingen and Simkhada provide reasons to explain why researchers fail to apply for an ethics approval for health research in low and middle-income countries and demonstrate that there are assumptions made by the researchers [6]. This case presents an experience in acquiring ethics approval from Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC) for health-related research; it demonstrates that, even with extenuating local circumstances, the process need not be considered a "barrier" to research [3].

Case Presentation

This case study describes an experience in obtaining ethics approval from a national REB for maternal health research in Nepal. The aim of the research was to understand the maternal health situation and needs of women in rural areas of Baglung. To understand the maternal health needs, participatory research was conducted with data collection tools such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory workshops. Ethics approval for the research project was obtained from both the Health REB of the Université de Montreal (CÉRES) and the NHRC.

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The Nepal Health Research Council (NHRC)

In 1991, the Government of Nepal established the NHRC. The Scientific and Ethics Committee within the NHRC used to review and approve health research in Nepal [7]. The first National Guidelines for Ethical Review were published in 1995, and the Scientific and Ethics Committee was formalized as an Ethical Review Board (ERB) in 2001. More than a decade after the forming of the ERB, it is still the case that not all health researchers apply for ethics approval or register their health research with the NHRC [6,7]. Thus, it has become impossible for the NHRC to be informed of and track the quantity or type of health studies that are conducted in Nepal [7,8]. One can surmise that a lack of complete adherence in seeking ethics approval from NHRC is, in part, due to assumptions made on the part of researchers, as well as on the part of NHRC staff. For example, Sharma and colleagues mention that NHRC guidelines do not provide a clear definition of health research [7]. This can create an assumption, by researchers, of the types of research that are required to go through the NHRC ethical review process. Having read the NHRC document titled *National Ethical Guidelines For Health Research in Nepal and Standard Operating Procedures, January 2011* (pg. 3-4), we argue that the types of research considered "health-related", and thus requiring an approval, can be inferred from the document. Although the types of research needing ethics approval are not explicit on the NHRC website, the guidelines nonetheless state that any research involving human participants necessitates ethics approval before conducting research in Nepal [9]. Moreover, the NHRC can clarify further if contacted by the researcher.

Ethics approval process: an experience

In our particular case, the lead researcher is fluent in Nepali. All email communication was in English, whereas conversations over the phone and in-person took place in Nepali.

The process was hassle-free and easy to follow. There is a 'Research Proposal Approval Format' – a form that researchers are able to download from the NHRC website. In addition, there is a checklist of documents required for the application (e.g., cover letter, project protocol, photo of the principal investigator (PI), résumé, consent form and data collection tools in Nepali, an approval letter from the University, and a fee of US$100 for research with a budget less than US$10,000). If the PI is a foreign national, he/she must collaborate with a Nepali researcher as a co-investigator, and they must file an application together (the application also requires the résumé and passport details of the Co-PI). When asked about this requirement, the NHRC officer mentioned that this measure is included as a way to prevent data exploitation practices.

Timeline

The lead researcher called and emailed the NHRC officer with queries before the application was submitted (Table 1).

Table 1. Questions and answers with NHRC staff during the process

Question	Response
1. I am a student; do I need to submit a full application? What if I already have an ethics approval from my University? Note: the question arose because there is a section called "for students''.	Yes, as a student you submit the full application with the additional documents required for a student (same day response). Yes, you submit the full application even if you have an approval from your University.
2. Is it okay to submit the application in parts if that makes the process faster? Note: Was waiting for ethics approval certificate from the University	Yes, (same day response)
3. Do we need parent's assent form for participants less than 18 years of age?	Yes (same day response)

We were told that the approval process would take 2-4 weeks after the application submission. The application was submitted April 21, 2015, a few days before the 7.8 Richter scale earthquake that hit the country. The earthquake caused substantive damage to infrastructure and resulted in many immediate casualties, as well as longer-term displacement and trauma. Not surprisingly, priorities within the NHRC shifted as a response to this shock. Although the NHRC officers were back to work within a week, their attention was on studies needing urgent consideration. Thus, the review process took longer than anticipated. The lead researcher was provided with comments 10 weeks after submission of the application and received an approval a week after re-submission with the amendments. Overall, approval was received within 11 weeks. We believe that this was an enormous achievement, in light of the nature and scope of the recent natural disaster in the country, and the spike in new studies that were submitted which were time sensitive. From the experience, we believe that the time required to receive an approval depends on the i) completeness of the application (i.e., carefully following the checklist), ii) quality of the research proposal and related protocol, and iii) the timeliness of approaching the local ethics board to allow for sufficient lead time before initiating data collection. In this case, the NHRC officers were helpful and answered all the questions that we had in a timely and thorough manner.

Conclusions

Although the process of preparing an application can be tedious, ethical review is a crucial step in health research. This case study demonstrates that it can be a straightforward process if the researcher limits her assumptions about the process, and engages with the local REB early on. Although one can argue that the guidelines from local REBs are not always crystal clear or strictly enforced, as researchers, it is our responsibility to seek ethics approval from the host country before we embark upon a health research project.

Based on the experience, we have a concrete suggestion for the NHRC (as the local REB) and researchers to facilitate an effective process of seeking ethics approval for health-related research:

- For the NHRC: in addition to the list of required documents, we suggest providing i) a clear definition of health research, ii) examples of the kinds of research that require an ethics approval, and a sense of iii) how long the review process takes. If published on the NHRC website, these pieces of information could help prevent false assumptions and increase the application rate.
- Researchers: ensure all the required documents are complete, of high quality, and submitted in a timely manner. Researchers can email the NHRC officers (in English) to ask any questions they may have to avoid confusion.

Questions to consider

1. Is there enough ethics training available to Canadian researchers who are conducting research in international contexts?
2. Should there be a more specific and clear definitions of 'health related' research? For example: what about studies that look at water and sanitation and do not directly involve human participants?
3. Should normal procedures for national ethics review be followed after a disaster, such as the Nepal Earthquake 2015? Do disasters represent an exception to the general rule of requiring an ethical approval?
4. Would it ever be legitimate to initiate research without national approvals? For example, circumstances such as long delays in ethics approval, deadlines with research funding.

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Seeking Ethics Approval in Colombia: A Health Systems Research Case Study

Juan Carlos Rivillas[1], Marie-Gloriose Ingabire[1]

Résumé
En Colombie, il n'existe aucune institution responsable de l'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et il n'existe pas de procédures spécifiques pour obtenir une approbation éthique pour un projet de recherche. Cependant, la résolution sur la recherche en santé du Ministère de la Santé et de la Protection sociale fournit des conseils sur les principales considérations éthiques de la recherche sur la santé et indique quelles institutions en Colombie pourraient fournir une approbation éthique. L'approbation éthique doit être fournie soit par l'institution d'affiliation du chercheur, l'établissement dans lequel la recherche sera menée, soit par l'autorité de santé responsable des communautés participant au projet. Malgré ces indications, notre expérience dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche sur les systèmes de santé a montré que la mise en œuvre et la pratique de l'éthique de la recherche varient d'une institution à l'autre. Une attention particulière devrait être accordée pour assurer la mise en œuvre efficace du processus d'approbation éthique.

Mots clés
éthique, développement, recherche, santé, Colombie

Abstract
There is no single institution responsible for research ethics in health sciences in Colombia and there is no specific procedure for securing research ethics approval in the country. However, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's resolution on health research provides guidance on key ethical considerations in health research and indicates which institutions in Colombia could provide ethics approval. Ethics approval has to be provided either by the researcher's institution of affiliation, the institution in which the research will be conducted, or the health authority responsible for the communities participating in the project. Despite this guidance, our experience with a health systems research project showed that the implementation and practice of research ethics vary between institutions. Attention should be given to ensuring effective implementation of the ethics approval process.

Keywords
ethics, development, research, health, Colombia

Background

Countries and institutions are striving to develop and implement ethics guidelines and approval processes to ensure quality and promote excellence in research. Since 1993, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's resolution Nº 8430 [1] has provided the legal framework for carrying out health research in Colombia. According to the definition in the resolution, health research encompasses the use of social science, science, technology, engineering or mathematics in the delivery of health care. This resolution establishes guidelines to obtain ethics approval, which depends on the institution where research will be conducted, or the health authority responsible for the communities that will be involved. It is the responsibility of these institutions to ensure that ethics reviews are conducted according to their jurisdiction and approvals obtained before research projects are commenced.

Although this resolution outlines the relevant ethical considerations, such as potential risk for research participants, informed consent for participation in research and the confidentiality of research participants, it does not provide a specific process for securing ethics approval. This applies both for researchers in Colombia whose institutions do not have an ethics review process and for researchers from outside Colombia. This case study illustrates how resolution 8430 was implemented in relation to our project as researchers affiliated with an institution outside Colombia.

Presentation of the case

This case study is the result of our experience seeking ethics approval for the health systems research project entitled "Measuring health financing-related inequalities in maternal mortality". The aim of this project was to explain how health financing influences maternal health policy implementation and outcomes. The experience from this study, conducted in Colombia in 2016, is presented to illustrate the challenges, pathways and critical reflections for research ethics review in Colombia. In our research project, we contacted 18 health care facilities in six regions of Colombia to request their support in conducting research in their institutions; only two health care facilities requested to see the ethics approval in compliance with the resolution that requires local institutions to conduct ethics review and provide approval.

In order to facilitate the research registration and to engage local institutions in Colombia, a summary of the research proposal was translated into Spanish and submitted to the Department of Epidemiology at the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in order to register the proposed study. We did this based on our familiarity with the Colombian research context, but it should be noted that this recommended step is not outlined in the Ministry's resolution.

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As part of the registration, ethics approval status is requested. The objective of registration is to inform the Ministry of Health and Social Protection that health-related research will be conducted in the country. Nevertheless, the proof of registration and the ethics approval of the study were instrumental when time came to engage with and obtain support from the institution in which the research was to be conducted and the health authority responsible for the population participating in the research. In our study, the registration and confirmation of ethics approval were considered as a proof that all requirements from the Ministry of Health and Social Protection were met, and this facilitated our engagement with local institutions and authorities and the implementation of the study.

We identified some specific implementation gaps related to limited awareness about the ethical approval process and the capacity to carry out these processes. The observed practice across the institutions we contacted may reflect limited awareness and/or capacity of most health care institutions and health authorities at the local level, which rely on researchers to obtain ethics approval from their research institutions, but where only international research organizations, local universities, and big think tanks have the capacity to do so. Securing ethics approval from the IDRC's Advisory Committee on Research Ethics (ACRE) was therefore critical for us to address all ethical considerations related to the qualitative component of our study, to ensure the timely conduct of our data collection.

Moreover, during the course of our research, we also consulted researchers in universities in Colombia to better understand the ethics approval process in the country. We noticed that some major research institutions have research ethics review bodies but there is minimal capacity at local health facility and community levels. For instance, ethics review boards are well established in Fundación Santa Fe de Bogota [2], Secretaria de Salud de Bogota [3], Colciencias [4], INVIMA [5], Profamilia [6] and most of the universities (e.g., Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Universidad de Antioquia, Universidad de Andes, Universidad CES, Universidad del Valle, Universidad de la Sabana, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana) [7-9], each having clear guidelines addressing research ethics in a coherent way.

Key considerations and conclusions

Based on our case study, it is not clear if the observed practice represents an exception or is consistent across local institutions. To ensure consistency and compliance in ethical practices related to health research, there may be a need in Colombia to establish a new or identify an existing authority with the capacity to provide guidance for ethics review and approval of health research in the case of researchers who are not affiliated with institutions that have ethics committees. Resolution 8430 is a good first step, but more is needed to make research ethics a mandatory requirement across the country. Based on our experience, in order to strengthen the process and facilitate ethics review in health and social sciences, we suggest that the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and Colciencias should assess the capacity for and consistency in ethics review, and address the gaps with capable and accessible new and/or existing institutions that are designated to conduct ethics review and approval.

It is worth mentioning that, in the near future, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is planning to make mandatory the registration of all health-related research projects in its database to facilitate coordination and management of all research activities in the country, as well as to develop a new bioethical framework for the country. This represents an opportunity for the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to outline the key steps required for all health researchers to secure ethics approval, including designating capable and resourced institutions to conduct health research ethics review.

Meanwhile, based on our case study in Colombia, for researchers in the current environment it remains important to register the research project in the Ministry of Health and Social Protection database and secure ethics approval beforehand from a recognized research institution in Colombia or internationally. Engaging with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection is also critical in facilitating the connection with and involvement of local health facilities or health authorities, if needed.

Even though the institutions involved in our study did not raise any need for ethics approval before we started our data collection, the very few that did raise it were only asking for proof of study registration and ethics approval but they did not conduct a review or additional assessment. This raises potential questions for future research. For instance:

1. To what extent, and using what mechanisms, could the Ministry of Health and Social Protection in Colombia help ensure ethical standards are being met, as per resolution 8430, in the course of research?
2. What is the role of local governments in supporting researchers who do not have affiliations with institutions that have established ethics review processes?

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Ethiopia: Obtaining Ethics Approval and the Role of Social Capital

Logan Cochrane[1]

Résumé

L'Éthiopie dispose d'un système d'évaluation de l'éthique de la recherche, mais peu de chercheurs internationaux obtiennent l'approbation en dehors des études sur la santé impliquant des échantillons biologiques ou des tests médicaux. Cette étude de cas décrit trois types d'approbations éthiques en Éthiopie et les projets de recherche qui y sont menés. En décrivant ces processus, je relate ma propre expérience dans ce domaine. Les questions soulevées dans cette étude de cas comprennent les préoccupations concernant la responsabilité des chercheurs internationaux ainsi que les secteurs où les universités et les organismes d'éthique pourraient accroître leur soutien afin de faciliter l'approbation des projets par les autorités nationales. J'expose le fruit d'une réflexion critique sur le rôle du capital social et des contacts personnels qui m'ont permis d'obtenir l'information pertinente pour l'approbation éthique de mon projet et qui m'ont soutenu tout au long de ce processus. Pour cette étude de cas, je retrace les étapes de mon expérience de recherche, de la demande d'approbation en 2014, reçue en 2015, jusqu'aux travaux menés en 2016.

Mots clés

approbation éthique, Éthiopie, capital social, justice sociale

Abstract

Ethiopia has a research ethics review system, yet few international researchers obtain approval outside of health studies that involve biological samples or medical testing. This case study outlines three types of ethics approvals in Ethiopia, and which research projects are suitable to them. In outlining these processes, I also reflect upon my own experience of obtaining ethics approval. The questions raised in this case study include concerns about accountability for international researchers as well as areas where universities and ethics bodies could improve their facilitation and support to ensure that the research conducted is approved by national authorities. I critically reflect on the role of social capital and relationships, which in my own case enabled access to information about where ethics approval could be obtained and provided significant support throughout the process. For this case study, I dawn upon my experience of applying for ethics approval in 2014, having that approval granted in 2015 and conducting research until 2016.

Keywords

ethics approval, Ethiopia, social capital, social justice

Introduction

According to members of the national ethics committee of the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI), very few international researchers who conduct social science research in Ethiopia have been approved by national authorities. International research projects that are typically submitted to the ethics committee for approval involve pharmaceutical testing or biological sampling from the health sciences. My experience working with international researchers in Ethiopia over the last twelve years aligns with that of the ethics committee: few social science research projects are reviewed and approved by national authorities.

From the perspective of international researchers, two issues are raised regarding why approval is not obtained. First, it is argued that their research has been approved by their own institution (see [1] for discussion). Second, it is argued that the Ethiopian ethics approval system is inefficient and causes years of unnecessary delays. In this case study I problematize both of these issues. Regarding approval by their own institution, I argue that it is inappropriate, and a replication of colonial attitudes, to argue that approval by authorities in another country is sufficient to justify bypassing national authorities. This argument complements the main article in this special issue [2]. Secondly, in my experience, the concerns of inefficiency and delays are not always accurate.

It is difficult to obtain information about how ethics approval is granted by national authorities in Ethiopia. Yet, this does not give researchers license to neglect such processes. This case study, and the series within which it resides, provides a wealth of examples about how researchers have successfully navigated complicated systems. National ethics approval does take time (several months), but that amount of time is not unreasonable in comparison to similar ethics review processes within university settings in North America and Europe. There are many reasons why researchers ought to obtain ethics approval, including legal ones [3]. There are also important reasons why researchers should engage with national ethics systems. In my own case, the process strengthened the research as the ethics committee members were more aware of local laws and issues, whereas my home university made an assessment based on ethical practices applicable broadly.

At the same time, however, this case study demonstrates that relationships and social capital can play a key role in ensuring that the processes are relatively clear, timely and efficient. I argue that universities must take a more proactive role in supporting researchers to obtain national ethics approval so that information and approval is not reliant upon social capital (as not all researchers have pre-existing relationships within the country where research will take place).

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Presentation of the case

In the summer of 2014 I inquired with an Ethiopian colleague who worked in the Federal Ministry of Health about how to obtain ethics approval for social science research on food security. I was informed that there were three options: 1) from a national authority, such as the Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI); 2) from a regional authority, such as from the respective regional health bureau; and 3) via a national university. I opted to seek national approval from EPHI. I would later learn that regional authorities only grant approval when the research is limited to a single regional state and do not have the authority to approve international graduate research projects. I also later learned that approval via a national university requires significant partnership with my home university, well beyond what I would have been able to facilitate. These details were not widely known, even within the agencies that have the authority to grant the respective approval.

I returned to Ethiopia in February, 2015. During the intervening months, I completed the required forms and had a second colleague from the Federal Ministry of Health meet with the national authority on my behalf. I also sought advice from a third Ethiopian colleague who had previously obtained national ethics approval from this same authority (EPHI). The process required developing a detailed research plan, for which I had to include components that were not required by my home institution – including involving Ethiopian graduate students, specifying how adherence to the plan would be monitored, and how I would disseminate the findings in Ethiopia. Following a public presentation with questions and answers, I received feedback on the proposal from the ethics committee and was required to revise accordingly. The additional content that was required reflected the different type of interests involved. Whereas my home university was concerned about process, the Ethiopian authorities focused on how the research would benefit the nation and its people. Notably, Ethiopian authorities gave less emphasis to participant risk in comparison to my home university, and thus may have weighed risks and benefits differently (raising questions about the degree of individual risk considered acceptable for national benefit).

From the initial inquiry to the approval, I used my contacts to support the process on eighteen different occasions. Undoubtedly, the process would have taken longer had I not been able to draw upon these personal connections for information, to liaise on my behalf and to inquire with authorities about the processes. In 2015, I wrote [4] about obtaining national ethics approval in Ethiopia and have since supported researchers from Canada and the United States as they navigate the ethics approval system. This too has highlighted the role of networks and the importance of networks and social capital in multiple spheres (domestic and international) in how researchers navigate unfamiliar systems, obtain information, and learn about processes.

The countries from which international researchers come to Ethiopia commonly outline that national ethics approval should be obtained, which is the position of Canada's Tri-Council [5]. Within Ethiopia, the challenge is not a lack of policies or processes to obtain such approval. Rather, there are challenges about accessing information and having the required support. It is common that graduate and early career researchers do not have the existing social capital that may be required to navigate national ethics approval systems. As such, universities must take a more proactive role. I propose two practical ways that universities can better facilitate this process and ensure national ethics approval is obtained. First, in typical North American doctoral programs, where research normally begins after the second year of enrolment, graduate programs need to ensure that students are looking into international ethics review processes well in advance so that sufficient time can be allocated, rather than waiting until students apply for ethics approval from their home university before this issue is raised. Second, university research ethics boards should maintain a database of countries from which national ethics approval has been obtained, and the respective authorities involved. This would provide guidance based on institutional experience. Pending the development of a more comprehensive reference system, such a database would allow for verification when researchers claim that no ethics approval system exists within the country where they intend to conduct research.

In advocating for national ethics approval in international development research, I am aware that some research is not welcome by the issuing government. Some of my own research has challenged the Government of Ethiopia, and I am cognizant of potential challenges raised in requiring national ethics approval [6,7]. However, research proposals do not need to speculate what the findings will be, rather they outline the ways in which research will be conducted. In many instances this does not bar researchers from engaging in contested topics and publishing critical research. In some cases the government may not approve research based upon the topic or geographic area proposed. Instances of this nature appear to be the exception, rather than the rule. In situations where the government may disapprove of the research for unjust reasons, it is important to consider the consequences; in Ethiopia, international journalists[1], volunteers and researchers have been detained and convicted by the authorities for acting without approval [8,9]. From the perspective of the government, clandestine research activity is illegal and researchers weighing the consequences of such endeavors must take into account the legal ramifications. The complex nature of ethical questions relating to unjust laws and politicization are grappled with in the main article of this special issue [2]. This case study has outlined the processes for obtaining approval in Ethiopia, and problematizes the justifications given for why this approval is not obtained.

Questions to consider

1. To what extent must researchers go to determine how national ethics approval can be obtained?

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[1] Two Swedish journalists were given eleven year prison sentences in 2011, they were released in 2012 after a lengthy diplomatic negotiation [9].

2. What would justify deeming that national ethics approval systems are too inefficient, too slow or non-existent to proceed?
3. Would this case have been approved had the researcher not had existing social capital? Or did the relationships enable a more streamlined approach within a system that lacks clarity?
4. Who ought to be responsible for monitoring the obtaining of national ethics approval in international development research?
5. When can national authorities be intentionally bypassed in order to conduct research on topics deemed politically inappropriate or unacceptable? Considering the consequences, are these areas wherein international researchers ought to take a lead role?

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Ethical Evaluation and Action Research: Toward New North-South Research Collaborations?

Mathieu Feagan[1]

Résumé

Cette étude de cas examine l'expérience de l'auteur en obtenant l'approbation éthique pour un projet de recherche-action, afin de développer des compétences pour de nouvelles collaborations de recherche nord-sud chez les étudiants gradués et formés à la santé et à l'environnement. Les auteurs font valoir que le processus d'évaluation éthique et le cadre recherche-action semblent communiquer entre eux. Alors que le premier pourrait renforcer le fossé entre les chercheurs et les populations étudiées, ce qui pourrait exacerber les asymétries de pouvoir nord-sud, le dernier pourrait supposer que de telles asymétries sont également aisément surmontées grâce aux bonnes intentions des chercheurs du Nord, plutôt que par le travail des acteurs du Sud pour reprendre le pouvoir. Des considérations sont proposées pour des approches plus réalistes de collaborations de recherches éthiques nord-sud.

Mots clés

évaluation éthique, recherche-action, développement des compétences, collaboration de recherche nord-sud

Abstract

This case study examines the author's experience gaining ethics approval for an action research project, to build capacity for new North-South research collaborations among graduate students trained in health and environment. It is argued that the ethics review process and action research framework seem to talk past each other. While the former may reinforce the divide between researchers and researched communities, potentially exacerbating North-South power asymmetries, the latter may presume that such asymmetries are overcome too easily through the good intentions of northern researchers, rather than through the work of southern actors to take back power. Considerations are offered for more realistic approaches to ethical North-South research collaborations.

Keywords

ethics review, action research, capacity building, North-South research collaborations

Background

With a "democratic and participative orientation," action researchers are committed to "pragmatic co-creation of knowing *with*, not *about*, people" [1]. Across the Americas, action research has a history of establishing collaborative relationships in the name of social and environmental justice [2,3]. In my one-year contract as a Research Award Recipient (RAR) with the International Development Research Centre's EcoHealth program [4], I wanted to engage peer groups in Canada and Latin America in an action-reflection process, to build new research capacity based on collective inquiry and learning across North-South relations.

This case study describes my experience seeking ethics approval for this project, and shares reflections on how the ethics review process and the action research framework intersect with dominant North-South power dynamics. I end with considerations for how international development research can begin changing the relationship between Northern research priorities and Southern community partners.

Gaining ethics approval

My project was essentially about supporting the work and formation of two peer groups – one in Canada and one in Latin America – while examining our different experiences of graduate training, and building new capacities for collaborative inquiry. Members of the Canadian group had been trained in ecosystem approaches to health (ecohealth), and our work together focused on using our collective experiences to improve this training, by intervening in the design and delivery of future ecohealth training. The Latin American group members were part of a graduate training program in environment, health, and society; our work focused on discussing the role of research in environmental justice and social change. In both cases, I hoped that by working through peer relations, the groups would learn something new about their own capacities for self-organized collaboration, and peer-led intervention strategies.

I submitted my initial concept note/proposal to the IDRC's internal ethics review committee by their first suggested deadline. The feedback from the committee called for more details about recruitment, consent, and data collection – how would I operationalize working with the peer groups? I re-submitted, with more specific examples:

- Prior to my contract with IDRC, the Canadian peer group had prepared a survey with open-ended questions designed by and for the group to understand some of the diversity of members' ecohealth training experiences. I proposed to conduct interviews with group members to capture deeper self-reflection and analysis of group dynamics, and I provided a consent form to this effect.

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- The Latin American group was different. Even though members knew each other, they now lived in different countries across South America, and were not engaged in regular interaction. To start, I proposed an online meeting to discuss the challenges and opportunities of using academic research for the purposes of social-environmental justice. I suggested that consent would have to be negotiated on an ongoing basis, depending on how (and whether) the group wanted to continue the discussion.

In both cases, I was dealing with dynamic group processes that raise questions about who is the researcher, who is being researched, and how these lines are drawn and redrawn as the project develops. Yet, in the eyes of the ethics committee, I was the sole researcher, and the peer group members were my research participants, not collaborators. While I wanted to push back against this framing, it also occurred to me that neither categorization – research participant or collaborator – fit clearly with either group. I suggested that the peer groups needed to direct their own group processes, such that the notions of recruitment, consent, and data collection would have to make sense to them; but I could see how this might not help the ethics review committee make a determination on my research protocol, since it would have to be responsive to the emerging needs of the groups [5].

The response from the ethics committee was relatively fast, given its workload with about 15 other RAR proposals. I was asked for some additional assurances on how I would protect the identity of the institutions that the graduate students in my peer groups were affiliated with, to avoid any reputational damage. I proposed additional measures to ensure confidentiality, and my project was among the first RAR proposals to be approved. But I was now five months into my twelve-month contract, and while the committee's feedback seemed helpful for thinking through my project further, I was not convinced that the ethics review process and the action research framework had much to do with each other: at best they seemed to talk past one another, each concerned with different priorities.

The ethics of research across North-South relations

There is a long history of communities in the global South reporting negative experiences with Northern researchers, intent on extracting data, rather than building collaborative relations [6]. Likewise, researchers from the North working in the South have raised critical questions about the actual benefits their research brings to communities [7], some going so far as to say: "ethical research guidelines [as imposed by Universities] could be yet another western construct that create a global discourse of 'our way' is the 'right way' to do things" [8]. My peers in the Latin American group introduced me to concepts – such as cognitive capitalism [9,10] – that they used to explain how Northern researchers typically impose research frameworks on Southern communities, undervaluing the knowledge those communities have already developed. We conducted our work in Spanish, but they explained how published work in Spanish is virtually ignored by the English speaking academic community.

I felt that we were sharing and learning a lot from each other, but one challenge that kept arising was that I was paid by IDRC to make time for this collaboration, whereas my collaborators had their own schedules and workloads that were already full. While I could justify putting more time into group coordination and logistics (we were funded to meet in person in Central America to deliver a workshop), this raised questions for me about how to support the group's self-directive capacities without imposing my own northern research agenda?

Now, three years later, I am still engaged with many of the same group members in Canada and Latin America, working on new projects, which I see as a sign of success of our collaborations so far. But this has not resolved the challenges of navigating the researcher/researched divide, nor am I convinced that we have avoided perpetuating dominant North-South asymmetries. The results from my interviews with the Canadian group, and the response to the workshop organized with the Latin American group, suggest to me that peer relations hold a key for learning about power relations, though transforming them is part of a much bigger project.

Considering new directions for ethical research collaborations

Given this issue of the *Canadian Journal of Bioethics* is focused on how newly mandated national ethics review processes can support the ethics of international development research, I ask:

1. How would mandated national ethics review committees confront the emergent ethical challenges of action research, as described in this case study?
2. Would mandated national ethics review processes play into a stronger international consensus on what are the ethical standards of international development research, or would we see sharp demarcations between different national priorities?
3. How could mandated national ethics review processes support community-based capacities to manage how Northern researchers gain access to working with Southern actors?

Given my experience discussed here, I see three interconnected issues that ethics review committees could have a role in addressing. The first is the simplest: introduce more precise language to distinguish between researcher-participant versus researcher-collaborator relationships, as many ethics review committees have done already (the Latin American group has since agreed to become a collaborator on a new grant in exactly this way). Second, ethics review committees require the purview and resources to go beyond approving (or not) a set protocol (with amendments), toward establishing ongoing lines of communication with researchers, to support the emerging nature of ethical issues, especially for action research projects. Last, the biggest challenge is for ethics review committees to acknowledge their place within the ongoing imposition of Northern research priorities on Southern communities. This challenge can only be addressed through a shift in power. For example, some indigenous communities have established their own ethical approval processes that do not depend exclusively on universities or the state, but rather recognize rights of communities to assess for themselves the benefits of proposed research projects, and then decide how to proceed [11]. Mandated national ethics review could be a step in the direction of greater local control; however, if the process falls under the purview of the state, then it seems likely that it will not get in the way of state priorities, even when they are at odds with indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination [12]. Without addressing these three related points, ethics review committees may be supporting forms of research that exacerbate injustices, while failing to support the kinds of ethical research collaborations that action research hopes to nurture.

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Being Ethical in a Context with Limited Ethics Oversight: A Study on Flooding Risk Management by Local Governments in India

Nidhi Subramanyam[1]

Résumé
Cette étude de cas décrit et illustre les questions éthiques auxquelles nous avons été confrontées lorsque nous avons obtenu l'autorisation de mener des recherches sur les processus de mise en œuvre des politiques du gouvernement local en Inde, qui n'a pas de lignes directrices légales ou de CÉR pour la supervision éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales. Nous nous concentrons sur les questions de consentement volontaire et d'exposition à des risques involontaires, où, dans cette étude de cas, le personnel de gouvernements locaux pourrait se sentir contraint de participer compte tenu de l'autorisation institutionnelle de mener des recherches accordées par leurs supérieurs.

Mots clés
politique gouvernementale locale, développement international, éthique de la recherche, Inde

Abstract
This case describes and reflects on ethical questions that we faced as we obtained permission to conduct research on local government policy implementation processes in India, which has no legal guidelines or REBs for ethical oversight of social science research. We focus on questions of voluntary consent and exposure to unintended risks, where, in this case, staff in local governments might feel coerced to participate based on the institutional permission to conduct research granted by their superiors.

Keywords
local government policy, international development, research ethics, India

Introduction

Local and regional governments in international settings require researchers to seek permission and institutional approval prior to permitting ethnographic research on their daily workings and policies. Such permissions and approvals may or may not fall within the purview of research ethics boards (REBs) in the researcher's home country. Although home country REBs are increasingly attentive to sociocultural influences on the comprehension of risk and the consent process or differences in power between foreign researchers and participants [1], they may not always be aware of procedures surrounding institutional (or governmental) permission to conduct international research at various levels. In the absence of a system for local ethics review (whether at the national or regional level), researchers might be unaware of procedural requirements such as institutional permission and approval until they arrive in the field, which is often after obtaining ethics approval from their home country REB.

In addition to procedural requirements, researchers and home country REBs also need to consider the conditions under which individual participants within the local or regional governments provide consent. They also need to be attentive to the unintended risks that consenting participants might be exposed to during the study. Many of these local governments are hierarchical organizations; the permission to conduct research from superiors (not to be confused with local research ethics approval) could coerce staff and employees to participate in the research study. As government decision-making and policies tend to be political, participants might inadvertently provide responses critical of the government institutions and/or those in power. Thus, through the study, the researcher might subject consenting participants to unintended risks such as reputational damage or institutional stigmatization, should the critical findings be published.

The objectives of this case study are to draw attention to and reflect on the following issues: lack of information on procedures to conduct research on government processes in an international setting with limited local ethics oversight; and the subsequent process of seeking voluntary and autonomous consent in a hierarchical organizational context where the permission to conduct research might result in participant coercion and exposure to unintended risks. In conclusion, I discuss some ethical questions presented by these issues.

The case

This case describes ethical issues that I confronted while studying flooding disaster management efforts by two municipalities in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region in India. The case is one part of a larger research project that I undertook when I was employed with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The protocol involved semi-structured interviews with local government staff and officials about their perceptions of flooding risks within their municipalities, and the various risk-reducing measures they undertook – especially in informal settlements that do not have 'legal' status (see [2] for additional details).

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The Advisory Committee on Research Ethics (ACRE) at IDRC reviewed and approved the study protocol. I did not obtain local approval from an Indian REB since it is not mandatory for social science research in India. To our knowledge and based on discussions with peers in the region, there are no REBs or national ethical guidelines for social science research in India. The 200-odd REBs that exist focus on biomedical research and clinical trials involving human subjects [3,4]. A caveat is necessary: the municipalities that I studied are not representative of the variety of local and regional governments in India. Additional research is required to understand how the procedural requirements to obtain permissions for the study described here vary across countries' agencies and regions.

Obtaining local 'approval' and 'consent' on the ground

When we approached local governments for data or requests for interviews, no one asked us for our research protocol or consent forms. This was not surprising since REBs or consent forms are not inherent to the research culture in India. Additionally, Indian governments are required to make some kinds of data publicly available. Instead, government officials demanded a letter of introduction from my supervisor and organization establishing my credentials and the nature and purpose of my research.

Article 3.6 of the Canadian *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) states that researchers do not need to seek an organization's permission to proceed with their proposed protocol if it is a critical inquiry into a public policy or its practice [5]. However, we submitted the required letter of introduction and sought permission from the local government before proceeding with our protocol. We obtained this permission to instill trust and gain access to staff and officials, who, in the absence of this permission letter from the higher authority of the municipal commissioner (or assistant commissioner) for the local government, would not share with us their perspectives on disaster policy implementation and governance. The 'approval,' that is, permission to conduct research which took about a week, was an internal memo directing employees to cooperate and share the relevant data. Unlike ACRE's research ethics approval process, it did not entail a scrutiny of our research protocol or methods.

The local government's permission to conduct research enabled to access various sources of secondary data in the form of statistics, maps, and policy documents. Several officials were also 'willing' to discuss the process of disaster management policy formulation and implementation. We were concerned that institutional approval from the local government might interfere with the consent process and prevent us from adhering to the core ethical principles of the TCPS2 (respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice) [5] while interviewing staff and officials. In Indian government institutions – like the ones we studied – where hierarchies are strongly inscribed and adhered to, consent may not be fully voluntary or autonomous as employees might feel compelled to participate in order to comply with their superior's orders. We also wanted to protect our interviewees from the potential risks of reputational damage and institutional stigmatization should they inadvertently reveal politically sensitive information about the policy making or implementation process.

In conformance with our protocol, we disclosed the purpose of our research and sought the interviewees' free, informed, and voluntary consent. We clarified that we would not report anyone for their unwillingness to participate in the interview or share personal reflections on the policies. We made it clear they had the option to be interviewed at their convenience, and opt out of sensitive questions – which a few did either by going "off-the-record," digressing or remaining silent. We also noted that publications or reports would not identify anyone by name or designation nor, since we avoided recordings, would interview notes be shared with anyone outside the research team. However, we did not explicitly state that resulting publications might be critical of local government policy as has been the case [2] since we were operating from the position of highlighting the impacts of policies on marginalized communities living in informal settlements in flood-prone areas.

This case, thus, exemplifies two main ethics-related issues that we encountered as we tried to apply a protocol reviewed through the process coordinated by ACRE in the Indian context with different institutional hierarchies and procedures and no oversight from local REBs on the ethical conduct of social science research. These issues are first, non-awareness of the procedural requirements to obtain organizational permission prior to conducting research, and second, seeking voluntary consent from participants who may have felt compelled to participate based on organizational permission without adequately comprehending the potential risks.

Questions to consider

1. Would having a system for local ethics oversight have alerted the researchers about local procedural requirements or permissions that are required before commencing research in government institutions? In what ways could a local REB have helped the researchers to design and implement the consent process to account for institutional compulsions that might impede voluntary and autonomous consent, and mitigate potential risks to participants?
2. What are some resources or infrastructure that could augment ACRE's organizational capacity? For instance, could ACRE compensate for the lack of local ethics guidelines or oversight by hiring an expert who is familiar with research procedures in the Indian context? More pragmatically, should ACRE demand letters permitting research prior to approving the protocol in international settings with no local REBs?
3. Who is responsible for enforcing ethical considerations in the Indian context with no local REBs or ethical guidelines for social science research – ACRE (a distant ethics committee with no legal power in India), the local government

administrator providing permission, a local university that is aware of the research culture in the region, or the self-guided researcher required to adhere to ethical standards? What are each of their limitations?

4. Researchers studying international development must interpret the core ethical principles of respect for persons and justice within the context of their study [6]. For a researcher acting from the position of social justice for a marginalized group, what are the ethical and scientific tradeoffs between protecting government participants from risks versus generating critical knowledge that might benefit the marginalized group?

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Consent Documentation and the Accessibility of Research Results in International Development Research

Erika Malich[1]

Résumé
Cette étude de cas touche les problèmes qui peuvent survenir lors de la recherche sur le développement internationnal, avec des réflexions basées sur des expériences de recherche au Pérou. Les deux questions à l'étude concernent les différences culturelles dans le processus de documentation du consentement et la préoccupation des retombées de la recherche au profit des participants.

Mots clés
Pérou, documentation de consentement, développement international, résultats de recherche, accessibilité, asymétrie de pouvoir

Abstract
This case study touches on issues that may arise in international development research, with reflections based on experiences conducting research in Peru. The two issues to be discussed are that of cultural differences in the consent documentation process, and ensuring that the benefits of research flow back to research participants.

Keywords
Peru, consent documentation, international development, research results, accessibility, power asymmetry

Introduction

It is important to understand the research context when considering the ethical implications of international development research. This may require research design and implementation to account for specificities of the local context and the broader implications arising from power imbalances between researchers and research participants. Considering the ethical implications of participant consent and data collection procedures is crucial, however, it is also important to consider the ethical dimensions to data dissemination and accrued benefits. Key ethical issues inherent in any type of research become apparent when working in contexts as a 'foreign researcher', and the issue of power asymmetries are particularly important to consider when conducting field work [1].

Case Presentation

This case reflects on ethical issues based on a project about the accessibility of research knowledge for policymakers in Peru. The accessibility of research refers to users being able to access and understand research knowledge, which is important to increase the use of evidence in practice. This project underwent ethical review by the Advisory Council for Research Ethics (ACRE) at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and was carried out in accordance with the Canadian *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, 2nd edition (TCPS2). After a thorough search, it was not apparent that any additional local Peruvian ethics requirements applied to this project.

Field work was conducted during June and July of 2016 in the cities of Lima, Piura, and Arequipa. Primary data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with educated individuals including researchers, communicators, and policymakers. The aim of the study was to build an understanding of what accessibility of research knowledge means for both researchers and policymakers in Peru, and to find opportunities for it to be increased.

Documenting Consent

In certain types of research it is possible that a researcher may be working in a context that is not well known to them. In addition, it is possible that there will exist power asymmetries between the researcher and the research participants. Both of these factors may necessitate different types of research design and protocol. The obligation to obtain free, informed, and sustained consent is recognized internationally by many research ethics policies. In the TCPS2, it falls under the principle of respect for persons, where Article 3.12 states that "evidence of consent shall be contained either in a signed consent form or in documentation by the researcher of another appropriate means of consent" [3].

Documenting consent in a culturally and contextually relevant way is important. In this case, as the project was dealing primarily with educated professionals, we felt justified in using a signature as part of the consent process, which was provided in Spanish, the participants' language. Through the course of the interviews, it became apparent that the practice of signed consent forms was not common-place for participants. While not all participants reacted, some viewed it as a necessary irritant (laughing about the rules "from Canada"), all the way to lauding the process as commendable and wanting it to be replicated. One interviewee in particular, a university researcher, had this to say about the informed consent process before the start of the interview:

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> Well, what has impressed me to start is the [informed consent] protocol. Yes, because I have given various interviews [in the past] and the most they have asked me is 'can we audio-record you?' and I have permitted the recording, but [the informed consent form] – it seems we should replicate it.

In different contexts, or with different subsections of a population (e.g., vulnerable groups, indigenous populations), different types of consent documentation procedures may be more appropriate. For example, one might consider audio-recorded consent or thumb-print consent for illiterate populations. There are many different ways that a researcher may legitimately document consent, and different options should be explored, taking into consideration the particular research participants and the cultural context. Local norms, including local legal requirements, need also be considered when selecting the best documentation method(s). The responsibility to understand the context and the research participants before deciding on the best method for documenting consent is the shared responsibility between the researcher with the support and guidance from their Research Ethics Board (REB).

Benefits to Participants

Another issue to consider is ensuring that research benefits flow back to participants. Researchers should, at a minimum, aim to ensure that their research is not "extractive" in nature. Extractive research refers to "research practices that extract knowledge from communities to the benefit of people elsewhere and leave communities unchanged or worse off than they were before" [5]. Aiming to make sure benefits of the research flow back to participants is one way to achieve this, however, depending on the type of research being conducted, other methodologies can be used to further minimize extractive research and work towards empowerment [5].

Sharing knowledge and learning with participants is important. In the TCPS2, in Chapter 4, this would fall under the principle of "equitable distribution of research benefits", where it states that:

> Researchers should ensure that participating individuals, groups and communities are informed of how to access the results of the research. Results of the research should be made available to them in a culturally appropriate and meaningful format, such as reports in plain language in addition to technical reports [4].

The nature of the 'accessibility' of research results, however, will vary in different contexts. Additionally, in most circumstances, research should also be made accessible beyond just research participants, but also to their communities of practice as well.

Some participants in our study raised the issue of not being able to benefit from previous research done in their contexts, or even being able to access it. This was particularly the case for those located outside the capital in less-resourced regions of the country. One university professor in Piura captured the idea well: "It happens frequently for us that we find studies and theses in foreign universities on us… A thing like you are doing, and then nobody knows". Another participant discussed the same issue even in the case of Peruvian researchers: "there are renowned Peruvian researchers that publish articles in foreign journals, and you know that they are there but you have to pay [to access them]." For these two participants, lack of finances and language barriers made accessing international journals difficult.

Researchers should therefore take the accessibility of research dissemination very seriously, as this is an ethical (and moral) responsibility. One possibility to increase accessibility is through publishing in an open access format, thus not requiring a user to pay to access the material. Researchers can also consider additional techniques to create even greater accessibility. As suggested by Smith, "there are diverse ways of disseminating knowledge and of ensuring that research reaches the people who have helped make it. Two important ways not always addressed by scientific research are to do with 'reporting back' to the people and 'sharing knowledge'" [6]. These techniques could include alternate publications of research results in plain (and local) languages, and in a culturally appropriate format, to both increase access for participants and to reach a broader audience.

It is the intention of our project to have any outputs exclusively in open access formats (this journal included), as well as providing results in English and Spanish where feasible, to increase the accessibility to research participants. Participants that indicated interest in the available place on their consent form will also be sent a plain language summary of the research findings in Spanish, along with other outputs of the project including blog posts (the results summary was not yet sent to participants at the time of writing).

Conclusion

Taking into consideration the specifics of both the cultural context and power asymmetries is important to document consent in a culturally appropriate way, as well as to assure that benefits return to research participants. When there exists the potential for power asymmetries between the researcher and research participants, it becomes important to consider these with great care. While this case study has only touched on two particular considerations, many other ethical dimensions exist that should also be considered. A researcher will be better placed to conduct ethical research if they are mindful of the context they are working in and make a proactive effort to respect, and ensure benefits flow back to, their participants and their communities.

Questions to Consider

1. What level of familiarity with a context is necessary to understand the best method of documenting consent?
2. What different ways can participants benefit from different types of research? What is the level of obligation from the researcher to ensure that these benefits are received?
3. Is it ever ethical to conduct 'extractive' research? How can researchers aim to avoid conducting extractive types of research?

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ÉTUDE DE CAS / CASE STUDY

Ethical Issues Related to Positionality and Reverse Asymmetry in International Development Research: Experiences in Researching South Asian Philanthropy

Nirojan Kulendrarajah[1]

Résumé
Le rôle de l'asymétrie et du positionnement dans la relation chercheur-participant à la recherche est important pour l'éthique de la recherche en développement international. Les situations où l'on identifie une « asymétrie inversée » doivent également être prises en compte par les organismes responsables et des stratégies devraient être élaborées afin de soutenir les chercheurs dans ce contexte.

Mots clés
Asie du Sud, positionnement, asymétrie inversée, développement international, institutions nationales d'éthique de la recherche

Abstract
The role of asymmetry and positionality of the researcher-research participant relationship is important for research ethics in international development. However, discourse should take into account instances where 'reverse asymmetry' may exist, and consider developing different strategies and concerns for researchers to consider in this context.

Keywords
South Asia, positionality, reverse asymmetry, international development, national research ethics institutions

Introduction

In field of international development research, there has been growing attention to the ethical issues that occur when researchers and research participants come from different cultural, national and socio-economic backgrounds – especially in the case where researchers from the Global North conduct research in the Global South. The researcher's respective background and privilege may inform their worldview, mindset and approach to research and knowledge and present issues for international development research in the Global South. In addition, the researcher's background and position of power can also privilege this worldview and knowledge at the expense of the research participant's worldview and mindset [1]. This may not only influence the research analysis and findings but also the considerations, weighting and assumptions related to issues of consent, justice and safety of the research participant. Most often, this asymmetrical relationship is characterized by a Northern researcher being in the position of power relative to their Southern participant [2]. However, this situation may obscure the diverse competing positions concerning the researcher and research participant's socio-economic class, gender, and nationality. The research participant may be even in a position of power and privilege relative to the Northern researcher, and not vice versa. This can create a condition of reverse asymmetry where the researcher is, due to the country and participant's socio-cultural context, the one with a lower relative positionality. This case study provides an example of how this situation can raise issues for international development research, and then provides observations and considerations for future researchers.

Case Presentation

This case study presents a year-long research project as part of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC)'s Research Awards, which involved qualitative research in urban India. The research project was a qualitative study on the city's philanthropic sector and involved a small number of interviews with officials from this sector. Ethics approval for the research was obtained from the internal research ethics process at the IDRC. The research project examined the role that particular non-profit and non-governmental actors play in the city's philanthropic sector and required interviewing officials from these organizations about their roles with respect to the general Indian philanthropic sector, as well of their own organizations.

Unlike other non-profits, many – if not most – of the actors in these philanthropic organizations are from a high socio-economic background, educated abroad and often from the financial or technology sector in India and abroad. In addition, the organizations' clients were often extremely wealthy and well-known figures from the country's business, technology, and entertainment sectors. While being a researcher from a well-known development organization in the Global North had its benefits and provided privileges such as increased institutional support, credibility and social networks[1], it was clear that the asymmetry traditionally discussed in ethical issues surrounding Northern researchers in the Global South was not present here. The positionalities of my research participants were different than the general concept of research particpants in India. While their ethnic and geographic backgrounds were similar to other Indian research particpants in international development research, they were in high socio-economic positions. This socio-economic position was the main and most salient aspect in my interactions with them. In addition to easing the navigation of ethical issues that are more pronounced in the traditional

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[1] That being said, no one except my initial contact in the sector had heard of the IDRC and one organization's staff thought I was an external auditor.

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Northern-Southern research particpant relationship, their high socioeconomic background also provided benefits in the research process as it contributed to a more relaxed and collegial atmosphere during interviews and discussions. At times, this reverse asymmetry provided different obstables to accessing, meeting or securing interviews with some more senior officials in these organizations, which could have provided more informative discussions on the subject matter. While this is an issue of participant recruitment, it points to emerging challlenges for researchers in international development as a result of changing positionalities and asymmetries.

Observations

Because the project was social scientific research, it was not required to obtain research ethics approval at the national level in India. At the same time, IDRC's research ethics process did not discuss or track any issues related to reverse asymmetry. The research ethics process did ensure that researchers were equipped to deal with issues of consent, vulnerability of research particpants and appropriate protocol in data collection and storage, all of which are vital and urgent requirements to conduct research in the Global South. However, as a Northern Institution, the IDRC research ethics process may not recognize context-specific local ethical issues emerging from fieldwork, such as reverse asymmetry. In this case, a local research ethics board (REB) in India may be better aware of the local and issue-specific risks and challenges to conducting research. While the reverse asymmetry that I faced did not threaten the research or researcher, it is clear that a REB in the Global North may be risking researchers in international development in cases where this reverse asymmetry does more than inconvenience the researcher and can possibly put the researcher in harm's way.[2] Aside from personal harms to researchers, this reverse asymmetry can affect the research process itself and thus the results and data in countries without local REBs. Research participants, particularly senior organization officials, may use this asymmetry to influence research findings or undermine the confidentiality of other participants. Even though the mandate of a REB is primarily to protect research participants, the risk to researchers or research in contexts where reverse asymmetry can pose issues may provide reflection on the appropriate role of REBs.

In many countries in the Global South, not all research participants will be the stereotypical vulnerable research particpants commonly assumed in international development research. There will also be transnational elites from the country's highest socioeconomic groups who hold power and privilege in a local or global context. Likewise, these situations of reverse asymmetry could also include research involving government officials or policy-makers, expatriates, and security sector/military personnel. In countries where ethics review for social science research is required, it may be that local REBs can provide more local and up-to-date information for Northern researchers in international development, as they may be more aware of the complex and intersectional identities and groups in their own country. For India, however, foreign researchers should perform an exhaustive personal evaluation of the field to ensure that any likelihood of reverse asymmetry and its implications for the researcher and the participants is understood and mitigated.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways does the Global North's history of international development work and research assume that researchers will always be in an implicit position of power in the researcher-participant relationship? What means might be implemented to change this assumption?
2. Given that both researchers and research particpants will have multiple competing positionalities, they might be in the position of power in an asymmetrical relationship. Is it possible for REBs to weight different positionalities as more important than others? What are some possible strategies to do that?
3. Given that the mandate of a REB is to ensure the protection and welfare of research participants, what is the appropriate and ethical role for a REB in situations where researchers may find themselves in a reverse asymmetrical relationship?

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[2] Some of the risks to safety that researchers, especially female researchers, may face in these contexts are illustrated by the testimonial from Mingwei Huang and her experiences [3].

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