Post-Research Ethics Analysis (PREA): A Tool for Health Research in Humanitarian Crises

Dónal O’Mathúna, Dublin City University, Ireland (donal.omathuna@dcu.ie); Chesmal Siriwardhana and Shannon Doherty, Anglia Ruskin University, UK; PREA Consortium

Abstract

- The post-research ethics audit (PREA) will promote ethical reflection and sharing of lessons-learnt by health researchers and disseminate this information through a dynamic, web-based repository.
- The first step in this process was to gather information through an online survey on the ethical challenges experienced by health researchers in humanitarian crises.
- This project is conducted by the Global Public Health, Migration & Ethics Research Group at Anglia Ruskin University, UK with the collaboration of a consortium of researchers from around the world (www.globalhme.org).

Photographs from the 2015 Nepal Earthquake are used with permission from Dr Pretesh Kiran, St John’s National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru, India.

Introduction

- The Sendai Framework calls for research and projects that generate evidence for effective and sustainable disaster risk reduction strategies. Health research to generate evidence for effective and sustainable disaster risk reduction strategies requires careful attention to ethical issues. The sudden onset of most disasters increases the risk of ethical oversight being rushed or bypassed. The interaction between different cultures raises other challenges. This is especially concerning when vulnerable groups such as women, children, and migrants are involved. Conduct of responsible, ethical and responsible research in humanitarian crisis settings requires the ability to monitor and analyse research processes through sharing of lessons-learnt. However, evidence of the effectiveness of research procedures themselves is limited, especially in disasters.

Methodology

- Currently, we are gathering empirical evidence through an online survey on the perceptions and experiences of ethical challenges that researchers encounter when conducting health research within humanitarian crisis settings.
- We are using a number of our international networks to enhance the response to the survey.
- The survey contains 34 questions grouped into 4 sections, takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and is available at https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/7KD02D7

Preliminary results

- Respondents had a wide variety of backgrounds working in humanitarian settings around the world with an average of 20 years experience.
- Research most often conducted with internally displaced persons and refugees.
- Main contextual factors contributing to ethical challenges were type of humanitarian crisis and obtaining ethics approval at country level.
- Only about one third of respondents (37%) reported obtaining both local and international ethics approvals.
- 94% of respondents indicated that a mechanism that would allow discussion of ethical challenges post-research would be beneficial.

Conclusions

- The PREA Project is at an early stage and will continue to collect data from researchers, ethics committees, research participants and others via both online surveys and in-depth interviews.
- PREA will promote knowledge sharing on ethical challenges of humanitarian and disaster research, supporting the Sendai Framework for effective and sustainable disaster risk reduction.
- PREA aims to establish a tool and an algorithm for researchers, ethics committees and other stakeholders (i.e. governments, advocacy groups, international ethics bodies) engaged in disaster research to analyze and respond to ethical challenges in disaster-related research and share lessons-learnt to improve ethical practice.


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