Ethical challenges in global research on violence against women and health

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This paper aims to explore new ethical challenges in global health service research on VAW.
"Ethics is not something else in the research, ethics is in the core of methodology."

LMIC1R

VAW
Healthcare services
Global health
Qualitative Study

• (i) semi-structured interviews with researchers and Research Ethics Boards (REBs) members involved with ethics approval
• (ii) documentary analysis of policies and guidelines on ethics in global research and research on VAW, both national and international

Exploring the data
• Read Extract Analyse Distil (READ) approach
• Framework method
• network of Ethical Relationship
RESULTS

Interviews

HIC
2 Researchers
2 REB Members
LMIC 1
3 Researchers
2 REB Members
LMIC 2
1 Researcher
2 REB Member
LMIC 3
3 Researchers
1 REB Member
LMIC 4
2 Researchers

Documents

7 Institutional
4 International
16 National
of which:

LMIC1  4
LMIC2  2
LMIC3  2
LMIC4  4
HIC    11
1. Challenges resulted from the global nature of the group

- Expectations based of HIC context
- Different conceptualizations of violence, with HICs often prevailing
- HICs perception of LMIC as less capable
- HIC led ethics application
- Difficulties in harmonizing different country regulations
- Open and honest communication as a solution
2. Challenges resulted from the studies location in healthcare setting

- Adds the need for approval from another REB (research ethics board)
- Health REBs sometimes have different expectations than the ones in the Universities
- Harmonizing research with existing health policies
- Biomedical nature of existing regulation for research on healthcare settings
3. Challenges resulted from the VAW topic

- Resistance to dealing with VAW in international partnerships
- Lack of clear definitions of vulnerable groups, where research subjects are often placed
- Differing measures to assure safety in the different countries
- Lack of education of the topic for REBs and researchers
- All the challenges interact and intersect
- Power imbalances between HICs and LMICs mark the process
- Harmonizing policies from different countries and different sectors creates extra challenges
- There is a lack of guidance of VAW research in healthcare settings
- The sensitivity of VAW makes the research more difficult and ethics more important
These challenges have a negative impact on researchers’ relationships and in the delivery of projects.

The process of ethics approval for global research on VAW and health should be more flexible, with equal power distribution between researchers and RECs in the studied high-income HIC and LMICs.

While some of these objectives can be achieved through education for RECs and researchers, the contextual factors should be addressed at the institutional and funder levels.
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