UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF ETHICAL GUIDANCE AND REVIEW FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH: A PRACTICAL WORKSHOP

Shiva D. Sivasubramaniam[1], Zeenath Reza Khan[2], Salim Razı[3], Sonja Bjelobaba[4], Irene Glendinning[5]

[1] *University of Derby, United Kingdom*
[2] *University of Wollongong in Dubai, United Arab Emirates*
[3] *Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey*
[4] *Uppsala Universitet, Sweden*
[5] *Coventry University, United Kingdom*

KEY WORDS

For effective management of research ethics there should be clear guidance and a properly designed procedure with identified responsibilities. Well-established ethical guidelines can provide the fundamental scaffolding to improve and enhance research quality. This would allow any researcher to adopt and abide by the guidance with respect for the underlying principles. Therefore, ethical considerations and guidance on how to conduct investigations should form the basis of research and training in any field.

It is a social responsibility to teach early career scientists to own and abide by the research principles from the beginning of their graduate level training. However, ethical policies/guidance and review processes are different from institution to institution, also from country to country. In some institutions the ethics policies are not implemented for undergraduate students, but only from a postgraduate level. Other researchers have highlighted inconsistencies in institutional guidelines which in turn hindered the predicted research progress (Desmond and Dierickx 2021; Alba et al., 2020; Dellaportas et al., 2014; Speight 2016). These inconsistencies may be linked to the requirements, perceptions/expectations of individual institutions and/or local legislations passed by different governments with pre-empting contextual conditions. Whilst areas such as medical research have well established/accepted universal ethical guidelines, other fields, though they may emphasise the importance of ethical practice, may have less defined universal guidelines. Yet, we identified freely available guidance from two organisations that are independent of the medical/biomedical disciplines: COPE (Committee of Publication Ethics) and ALLEA (All European Academics); both organisations provide support for maintaining research ethics. The former mainly focuses on publication ethics and therefore indirectly influences ethical behaviour in research, while the latter provides a framework for self-regulation across all scientific/scholarly disciplines and for all research settings.

Medical research usually involves human participants and animal models. The former group is protected by international treaties, which have been mostly ratified by individual governments. Due to this, there are internationally accepted guidelines for the participants in line with this treaty obligations and duties. As for animal welfare, international organisations such as the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH), and International Convention for the Protection of Animals (ICPA) provide guidance on animal welfare in research. This has resulted in the development of well-established guidance for

human/animal welfare and institutions are giving precedence to formulate ethical guidance based on medical research. However, is this "one size fit all" type approach appropriate for all disciplines? What are the barriers for establishing either institution-wide or subject-specific ethical guidance? How can these barriers be transformed into enablers to develop these policies?

In summary, we are particularly interested in inclusivity outside the STEM subject areas. For example, in disciplines such as social sciences, education and/or art and design where there are no need to deal with the conventional issues that are evident in science and medicine. As for barriers and enablers, based on our initial literature survey (Desmond and Dierickx, 2021; Huybers, Green, and Rohr 2020; Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2018), we have identified four common themes that might impose both. We have classified them as (a) organisational, (b) individual/team based, (c) research type related and (d) collaborative influences. Organisational enablers include the institutional desire to recognise/promote ethical behaviour in research by providing the infrastructure and assistance. In contrast, ambiguity in operational expectations, lack of measures for implementation or failing to identify/address problems (or making reasonable adjustments), not reflecting on and learning from failures can all be barriers at the organisational level. Likewise, individuals can provide a positive and proactive influence to produce ethical guidance. By clearly communicating their research protocol,

and expected outcomes, they can enable the developments and/or reasonable adjustments. This information would assist in improving ethical guidance, especially in an institutional approach to address research in all subject areas/fields. A comparative understanding of different research methodologies would also help to establish research guidance. For example, the methodologies and the forms of data acquisition are different between invasive types of research (where interventions may physically or psychologically affect the participants) and non-invasive research (including questionnaires, meta-analysis, informatics etc.). Finally, the enablers for collaborative cross-institutional ethical policies include common/national guidance, level of importance and properly designed legal requirements. In fact, an understanding of the common goals and how the methodologies may affect different participating organisations is essential in cross-institutional collaborative research.

In this workshop, authors propose to first present a summary of findings from their primary research based on information gathered relating to the barriers and enablers of forming ethical guidance. The workshop participants will then be moved into small discipline-specific sub-groups to discuss ethical approval procedures within each particular field.

This will be followed by a plenary discussion for all participants in order to prepare the participants for the issues that might occur in research, especially when working in an interdisciplinary field.

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