Ethical Issues in Collaborative Research

Daniela Elena Costea

Professor in Tumour Pathology
Experimental Pathology Research Group
University of Bergen, Norway

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, you should be able to:
- Recognize collaborative research ethics
- Identify ethical issues in team-based research
- Recognize ways of addressing conflicts of interest
- Recognize international and cultural considerations in research

Learning Methods

- Educational Video
- Discussion Forum
- Case Study Exercise
- Reading Material

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What is Collaborative Research Ethics?

Collaboration is essential for research.

Research involves many different types of collaboration.

- cooperation between different researchers and research institutions
- cooperation between researchers and communities/ civil society organisations, user groups
- cooperation between researchers and participants
- cooperation between researchers and industry
- cooperation between researchers and funders
- cooperation between researchers and media.

Research partnerships often involve partners that are not equal in power, status, and resources.

Collaborative research ethics refers to the principles and guidelines that govern ethical conduct in research collaborations involving multiple individuals, organizations, or institutions.

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Key Aspects of Collaborative Research Ethics

Challenges may be particularly prominent when there are power differences and lack of equality between partners.

The Trust Code has been developed through extensive consultations and is a valuable resource for all stakeholders for development and implementation of equitable research partnerships (Trust, 2018).

Another valuable resource is The Montreal Statement (2013), which outlines principles to guide trustworthy research collaborations in order to enhance integrity in cross-national, cross disciplinary and cross-sector research.

https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/resources/the-research-ethics-library/legal-statutes-and-guidelines/montreal-statement-on-research-integrity-in-cross-boundary-research-collaborations/

Ethical issues are a both a collective responsibility of collaborating partners and an individual responsibility of all taking part, not least issues concerning purpose and quality of the research. The principles of the Montreal statement include General Collaborative Responsibilities, Responsibilities in Managing the Collaboration, Responsibilities in Collaborative Relationships, and Responsibilities for Outcomes of Research.

Key Aspects of Collaborative Research Ethics

- Respect for Participants
- Transparency and Accountability
- Equitable Partnerships
- Conflict of Interest Management
- Data Sharing and Ownership
- Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity
- Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing
- Ethical Review and Oversight

Key Aspects of Collaborative Research Ethics

Respect for Participants: All collaborators must prioritize the welfare, dignity, and rights of research participants. This includes obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and protecting vulnerable populations.

Transparency and Accountability: Collaborators should be transparent about their roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the research project. Clear communication and documentation of agreements, protocols, and data-sharing practices are essential to maintain accountability.

Equitable Partnerships: Collaborative research should be conducted in a manner that promotes fairness and equity among all partners. This involves recognizing and valuing the diverse expertise, perspectives, and contributions of each collaborator, regardless of their status or affiliation.

Key Aspects of Collaborative Research Ethics

Conflict of Interest Management: Collaborators should disclose any potential conflicts of interest that could influence the research process or outcomes. Transparent management of conflicts ensures the integrity and credibility of the research findings.

Data Sharing and Ownership: Agreements regarding data sharing, ownership, and intellectual property rights should be established early in the collaboration. Clarity on these issues helps prevent disputes and ensures that research data are used responsibly and for the benefit of society.

Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity: In cross-cultural or international collaborations, researchers must respect and accommodate cultural differences, norms, and practices. Sensitivity to issues of power dynamics, language barriers, and cultural biases is crucial for building trust and fostering inclusivity.

Key Aspects of Collaborative Research Ethics

Community Engagement and Benefit Sharing: Collaborative research should actively involve relevant stakeholders, including community members, policymakers, and endusers, throughout the research process. Meaningful engagement promotes the co-creation of knowledge and ensures that research outcomes address community needs and priorities.

Ethical Review and Oversight: Research involving human subjects or sensitive data should undergo ethical review by institutional review boards (IRBs) or ethics committees. Collaborators are responsible for ensuring that their research activities comply with ethical standards and regulatory requirements.

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Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

- Authorship and Credit

- Informed Consent

- Data Management and Sharing

- Conflict of Interest

- Research Integrity and Misconduct

- Power Dynamics and Equity

- Community Engagement and Stakeholder Involvement

- Researcher Well-being

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Authorship and Credit: Disputes over authorship and credit allocation can occur within research teams, particularly when determining who should be listed as authors on publications or presentations. Issues may arise if contributions are not accurately recognized or if individuals who did not substantially contribute are included as authors.

Measures:
- Establish clear authorship criteria and guidelines at the outset of the project.
- Hold regular discussions within the team to assess individual contributions and determine appropriate authorship.
- Use contributorship models to differentiate between individuals who contributed substantially to the research and those who provided other forms of support.
- Document authorship decisions and agreements in writing to avoid disputes later on.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Informed Consent: Ensuring that all team members obtain informed consent from research participants is essential. Ethical issues may arise if participants are not adequately informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, potential risks, and benefits, or if consent is coerced or not freely given.

Measures:

- Develop comprehensive informed consent documents that clearly explain the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the research to participants.
- Ensure that all team members receive training on obtaining informed consent and adhere to ethical guidelines and regulatory requirements.
- Provide opportunities for participants to ask questions and seek clarification before consenting to participate.
- Regularly review and update informed consent procedures to account for any changes in the research protocol or participant population.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Data Management and Sharing: Ethical considerations regarding data management, sharing, and confidentiality should be carefully addressed within research teams. Team members must adhere to data protection regulations, ensure the security of sensitive information, and obtain necessary permissions for data sharing while protecting the privacy and confidentiality of research participants.

Measures:

• Establish data management plans outlining how data will be collected, stored, analyzed, and shared within the research team.

• Implement secure data storage and transfer protocols to protect the confidentiality and integrity of research data.

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- Establish data management plans outlining how data will be collected, stored, analyzed, and shared within the research team.
- Implement secure data storage and transfer protocols to protect the confidentiality and integrity of research data.
- Obtain necessary permissions and approvals for data sharing, including informed consent from participants and compliance with institutional policies and legal requirements.
- Use data sharing agreements to clarify ownership, access, and usage rights for shared data among team members and external collaborators.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Conflict of Interest: Identifying and managing conflicts of interest among team members is crucial for maintaining research integrity. Ethical issues may arise if conflicts of interest, such as financial interests, personal relationships, or professional biases, unduly influence research design, conduct, or reporting.

Measures:

- Require all team members to disclose potential conflicts of interest, including financial interests, personal relationships, or professional affiliations that could influence the research.
- Establish procedures for reviewing and managing conflicts of interest, such as recusal from decision-making processes or the appointment of independent reviewers.
- Monitor and periodically reassess potential conflicts of interest throughout the research project, especially in cases where circumstances may change over time.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Research Integrity and Misconduct: Preventing research misconduct, such as plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, or selective reporting of results, is essential within research teams. Ethical issues may arise if there is a lack of transparency, honesty, or accountability in research practices.

Measures:

- Provide training and resources on research ethics, responsible conduct of research, and good scientific practices to all team members.
- Foster a culture of integrity, transparency, and accountability within the research team through open communication and adherence to ethical principles.
- Establish procedures for reporting and investigating allegations of research misconduct, including plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, or other unethical behaviors.
- Encourage collaboration and peer review as mechanisms for ensuring the accuracy and validity of research findings.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Power Dynamics and Equity: Recognizing and addressing power dynamics within research teams is important for promoting equity and fairness. Ethical issues may arise if there are unequal distributions of resources, decision-making authority, or opportunities for participation, particularly in interdisciplinary or international collaborations.

Measures:
- Foster an inclusive and respectful research environment that values diverse perspectives, experiences, and contributions from all team members.
- Promote transparency and fairness in decision-making processes, resource allocation, and opportunities for participation within the research team.
- Provide mentorship, support, and professional development opportunities to individuals from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds to address disparities in power and privilege.
- Encourage regular feedback and reflection on power dynamics within the team and implement strategies to mitigate any negative effects on equity and inclusion.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Community Engagement and Stakeholder Involvement: Ethical considerations regarding community engagement, stakeholder involvement, and benefit sharing should be integrated into team-based research. Ethical issues may arise if community perspectives, concerns, or priorities are marginalized or disregarded in the research process.

Measures:

- Involve relevant stakeholders, including community members, policymakers, and endusers, in the research process from the outset through participatory approaches.
- Prioritize active listening, dialogue, and collaboration with stakeholders to understand their perspectives, needs, and priorities.
- Implement mechanisms for feedback, consultation, and co-creation of research objectives, methodologies, and outcomes with stakeholders.
- Ensure equitable distribution of benefits and outcomes from the research to the communities and stakeholders involved, including opportunities for capacity-building and knowledge exchange.

Ethical Issues in Team-Based Research

Researcher Well-being: Ensuring the well-being and professional development of team members is essential for ethical research conduct. Ethical issues may arise if there are inadequate provisions for mentorship, support, or work-life balance, leading to burnout, stress, or other negative outcomes among team members.

Measures:

• Prioritize the well-being and work-life balance of team members by promoting supportive and flexible work environments.

• Provide access to resources and support services, such as counseling, mentoring, or professional development opportunities, to address stress, burnout, or other challenges.

• Foster a culture of collaboration, mutual respect, and appreciation for diverse skills and contributions within the research team.

• Encourage open communication and regular check-ins to monitor and address any concerns related to the researcher well-being proactively.

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Recognize ways of addressing conflicts of interest

- Disclosure and Transparency

- Evaluation and Review

- Mitigation and Management

- Transparency and Documentation

- Training and Education

- Continuous Monitoring and Review

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Recognize international and cultural considerations

- Cultural Sensitivity
- Language and Communication
- Ethical and Regulatory Differences
- Power Dynamics and Equity
- Community Engagement and Involvement
- Cultural Competence and Training
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Ethical Review and Oversight

Summary

- Recognize collaborative research ethics
- Identify ethical issues in team-based research
- Recognize ways of addressing conflicts of interest
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Case for discussion

Scenario: Collaborative project investigating a treatment for a rare disease.

Ethical Dilemmas:
- Conflict of Interest
- Informed Consent
- Data Sharing and Transparency
- Equitable Partnerships
- Community Engagement

Thank You!