One Health Ethics: The need for policy before research and action

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Introduction

One Health institutions working with animals or plants should not underestimate the importance of human research ethics. There is need for broader ethical frameworks to encompass One Health research.

The universal ethical principles of human-subject research presented in the Belmont report as Respect for Persons, Beneficence and Justice, should be applied to custodians of animals and the environment.

Here, we describe experiences of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in implementing human research ethics in livestock projects.

Justice: Flexibility in documenting consent may increase participation (Kenya)2

- Signatures and thumbprints may be associated with risk or ritual in some communities.3
- When given the option, 61% (140/230) Nairobi milk traders chose verbal consent, 39% (90/230) signature and none chose to provide a thumbprint.
- Sex and occupation were associated with consent mode chosen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Odds ratio 95% CI</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.09 (0.112)</td>
<td>0.0128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex (male vs. female)</td>
<td>2.2 (0.92–5.4)</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Position</td>
<td>1.9 (0.56–6.4)</td>
<td>0.305</td>
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</tbody>
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Multivariable logistic regression model with enumerator as a fixed effect

Respect for Persons: Visual tools for better-informed consent (Tanzania)3

- Livestock owners do not always comprehend project information and therefore consent is not truly informed.
- A cartoon research tool was found to improve comprehension and engagement in the informed consent process compared to a conventional, written information sheet (typically read to participants).
- Dialogue stimulated by images led researchers to better understand the unique relationship of each participant with their livestock.

Beneficence: Sharing benefits using participatory photo (Vietnam)

- During a long-term impact assessment, participants took photographs to represent changes on their pig farms.
- Voluntary participation in a photography exhibition gave farmers the opportunity to teach and learn from each other’s experience in pig production, thus sharing benefits of research.
- Participation rate was 90% (45/50).
- Feedback was positive: 78% (35/45) named something they learned, 62% (28/45) something they taught and 69% (31/45) something new they would try.
- This peer-sharing democratised the knowledge created and served as a method to share research results with participants.

Non-maleficence: Point of contact

- ILRI policy is to provide research participants with institutional research ethics committee (IREC) contact details.
- IREC has never been contacted.
- Language barriers, cost of communication and cultural dimensions, such as high relative power-distance scores, may contribute.

Key learnings from these experiences

- A One Health research ethic considers animals and the environment to be intrinsically valuable and also acknowledges the relationships humans have with them.
- Human research ethics committees have an important role in institutional policy around animal and environmental research.
- Adaptive and context-specific approaches must be used when applying a One Health ethic.

Visual tool for seeking informed consent

References


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