Research Ethics in Disasters

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ETHICS
Ethical clarity achieved through reliance on IRB; relaxing ethical radar after IRB approval is gained

Ethics-as-IRB: Ethical clarity achieved through reliance on IRB; relaxing ethical radar after IRB approval is gained.

Ethics in Practice: Ethical uncertainty arises in the course of research; researcher acutely aware of their moral responsibilities to participants and fellow researchers.

Ethics-as-All: Ethical clarity achieved through deliberate research design and shared research decisions with participants.

MORAL HAZARD

• There is no universal definition of ethical behavior and conduct for disaster researchers

• Only a handful of countries have guidelines for conducting ethical post-disaster research

• Many countries do not have IRB’s
A Call for an Ethical Code of Conduct in Disaster-Zone Research

https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03534-z
TOWARDS A CODE OF CONDUCT

• Researchers should be equipped with an ‘ethical toolkit’ (Browne and Peek, 2014) before conducting disaster research that considers three principles:

1. Have a clear purpose.
2. Respect local voices.
3. Coordinate locals and outsiders.
1. HAVE A CLEAR PURPOSE

- Collectively identify knowledge gaps
- Partner with affected communities to establish research priorities
- A code could help redress power imbalances through ensuring that research priorities align with the needs and priorities of the communities being studied.
2. RESPECT LOCAL VOICES

- Wealthy countries account for most disaster scholarship and funding
- Outside researchers are positioned to seek funding and might overlook local partners
- Understanding local languages, policies, and practices can help improve response and speed up recovery (consider ‘culture brokers’)
- More discussion between disaster researchers within and outside of affected areas
3. COORDINATE LOCALS AND OUTSIDERS

- Projects that are uncoordinated can be costly and redundant and can overwhelm local people and responders.

- Local researchers in affected areas should be identified quickly as well as outsiders with local expertise; this can help ensure that outside researchers conduct research that takes the local context into consideration.
Some First Steps and Next Steps
Welcome to the Social Science Extreme Events Research (SSEER) web map, which is an initiative of the CONVERGE project headquartered at the Natural Hazards Center.

SSEER is a National Science Foundation-supported network for social science hazards and disaster researchers. The purpose of SSEER is to identify and connect social science researchers to one another, to interdisciplinary teams, and to communities at risk to and affected by hazards and disasters.

The SSEER Researchers interactive web map highlights the location of SSEER researchers and includes information about them, including their organizational affiliations, job titles, disciplinary foci, methodological expertise, the types of hazards and disasters they study, the events they have researched, and other information.
TOWARDS A SHARED CODE OF CONDUCT

• NOT calling for bureaucracy, regulatory oversight, or another version of the IRB

• ARE calling for a conversation to advance a shared set of moral and ethical principles to help guide what we study, who we study, how we conduct studies, and who is involved in the research process itself

• Collaborative disaster-research initiatives worldwide could help to initiate the development of a shared code of conduct through:
  • Utilizing existing structures for information sharing and coordination
  • Building on disaster-response initiatives from other fields
  • Upcoming meetings

https://hazards.colorado.edu/workshop/2020/researchers-meeting/overview
Disaster-zone research needs a code of conduct

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https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03534-z
Further Readings


• Wilson, Rick, Nathan Wood, Laura Kong, Mike Shulters, Kevin Richards, Paula Dunbar, Gen Tamura, and Ed Young. 2015. “A Protocol for Coordinating Post-Tsunami Field Reconnaissance Efforts in the USA.” *Natural Hazards* 75: 2153-2165.

• Others? Please send to Lori.Peek@colorado.edu.