

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEES: THEIR IMPORTANCE IN BUILDING A VIBRANT RESEARCH COMMUNITY IN KAZAKHSTAN

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The functions and benefits of research ethics committees in developing and transition economies go much further than those in developed countries. Firstly, a fundamental objective of a research ethics committee in both developing and transition economics is to establish the public's trust in both research and investigators. Studies in many developing countries indicate that the participants' trust in the research team is one of the main conditions considered during the participants' decision process to participate in a research project. Secondly, a fundamental issue for the research ethics committee is to ensure that the research team has properly evaluated the level of risk that participants are subjected to. Harassment and coercion are two common features of government-layperson relationships in many developing nations. Promoting collaborative research partnerships between communities and investigators facilitates community rights and community ownership, both fundamental benchmarks for the conduct of ethical research. Thirdly, possibly the most important objective of the research ethics committee in a developing or transition economy is to provide ethics education to investigators. The ethics committee and the individual investigator need to be considered collaborators on research projects. Investments in research in many places in the developing and transitioning world are disproportionate to the almost complete absence of investment in research ethics. This restricts the ability of these countries to become "global hubs" for research as shown by the failure of India. Fourthly, research ethics committees can have the role of legitimizing investigators and ensuring a minimum level of quality. This is especially important with respect to accessing government decision makers.

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