

# Ethical Social Research in Disaster Settings

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# Is it ethical to do research in CHE?

Where aid givers give, researchers take....

BUT

It is unethical not to do research in disaster.

( Sumathipala, Jafarey, et al)

# Disasters

## (MSF)

- Natural catastrophe
- Human-made catastrophe ( Bhopal in India)
- Acute epidemics
- War

# The 2<sup>nd</sup> Tsunami

(Citraningtyas, Macdonald, Herrman)

# Social researchers want to know...

At various levels, in different contexts:

Interactions, interconnections of people, people  
& systems

Cooperation, conflicts

Power, governance, systems

Meanings, meaning-making & behavior

# No international regulation

- Some approaches:

CIOMS 2009

Tri-Council Policy Statement Canada

Working Group on Disaster Research and Ethics  
2007 (Global Health Trials)

Schopper 2010. MSF

# PHREB 2011 National Guidelines

- Chapter on Ethical Guidelines for Research on Special Populations
  - Disasters and Emergencies



# Research ethics in disaster situations: baseline assumptions

- Research needs to be initiated quickly to be meaningful for the study community (but know your study group)
- Must be submitted for ethical scrutiny
  - a. Relevance to affected community – benefit must clearly outweigh harm

Ex of harm: security/confidentiality of data on corruption

Ex of benefit: how to return of study to participants when they are gone

- Documentation (confidentiality; security of records)
- Ethics of RAs, field assistants
- Harm for RAs, field assistants
- Observation, privacy and dignity

## b. FPIC

- Disclosure of risks , many of whc can't be anticipated – highly fluid situation
- Know specific vulnerabilities and dynamics
- Questions of freedom and capability of participants

## c. Participatory processes?

Citranningtyas, et al:

People spontaneously talk about their experience but not willing to be interviewed.

# Services & Research can converge



# Moral duty to

- Respect culture (example Mangyan tradition: don't go inside the house when there is a sick person)
- Gender (example the social science tradition of household survey)
- Give priority to people not data collection

The same ethical standards and principles apply as in other research?

Tim: whenever, wherever people are suffering from simultaneous extreme vulnerabilities combined with simultaneously occurring critical needs, ETHICS MUST BE MORE RIGOROUS, MORE VIGOROUS

MSF: Ethics review must be timely and flexible but also MORE STRINGENT due to greater vulnerability of study communities

# WHY?

- Local ethics review may not be functional
- Usual community organizational structures collapsed (door/gate keepers) (no doors, no gates)
- Capability for genuinely autonomous, meaningful consent absent
- Disaster could worsen actual, potential conflicts
- Research could divert much needed resources



- Is research feasible? Can it be completed (respondents gone tomorrow; schedules awry, research facilities non existent)

# Summary

- Explicit, definite identification of benefit (no vague promises) and risks
- Clearly identify the beneficiaries, users of data
- Describe clearly how benefit will be received by participants
- Know the specific vulnerabilities of every participant, researcher
- Know the risks of methods (social observation, group methods)
- Know security risks of data
- Innovate FPIC processes

Madamu guid nga salamat