

Ethical Issues in Collaborative Research

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Outline

- I. Collaborative research defined
- II. Enhancing research collaborations
- III. Ethical issues in collaborative research
- IV. Summary

Genetic Research in Developing Countries

“Postal Research”

- Developing countries courier biological materials to the west

“Parachute Research”

- Western researchers travel to developing countries to collect biological samples



Collaborative Research

- Collaborative research can be defined as researchers working together to achieve the common goal of producing new scientific knowledge
- It is an umbrella term for methodologies that actively engage researchers, communities and policy makers in the research process from start to finish.

Why do people collaborative?

- Science has been increasingly dependent on collaborations.
- No single person has the skills, knowledge, and resources to address all research problems.
- Research has been significantly configured by the idea that researchers should work in collaboration, rather than in isolation.
- Global health research collaborations have the potential to play a significant role in addressing global health disparities

What drives the increasingly collaborative nature of research?

1. The push from funding agencies to do research within and across disciplines and industry.
2. The need for complementary skills in research.
3. The availability of ICTs that support communication process.
4. Technology transfer from academia to industry has provided incentives.
5. The evidence that collaborations improve progress.

What researchers look for in collaborations

- Active involvement in cutting-edge, interesting science
- Effective Leadership
- Competence in and commitment to good scientific practice
- Capacity building
- Respect for the needs, interests and agendas of all partners
- Opportunities for discussion and disagreement
- Trust and confidence
- Justice and fairness in collaboration

Enhancing Research Collaborations

Preempting Discord: Prenuptial Agreements for Scientists

“Nothing should be taken
for granted when
researchers decide to
collaborate.”

Howard Gadlin



Six Key Components of Successful Collaborations

Macrina, F. Scientific Integrity: An Introductory Text Second Edition. American Society for Microbiology Press. 2000.

#1 Communicate first, second and throughout

#2 Discuss in advance who will do what in a project, while understanding that the research may evolve

#3 Discuss authorship in advance

**#4 Discuss data and material
management in advance**

**#5 Discussing intellectual property
issues in advance**

#6 Manage Accountability

Ethical Issues in Collaborations

Authorship

- It has been recognized that collaborative partnership initiatives have shown promise and attracted growing interest
- However, there has been little attention given to fair distribution of authorship credit within these partnerships
- Several reports show that unethical authorship occurs in more than 10% of cases
- Zachariah et al. describes difficulties associated with distributing authorship in research teams conducting operational research in low and middle-income countries
- Guidelines on authorship often excludes recognition of important actors who have made essential contributions to research in LMICs

Authorship

1. Authorship guidance not adequately applying to global health research because it requires authors to write or substantially revise the manuscript.
2. Current guidance on authorship order does not address or mitigate unfair practices which can occur in global health research due to power differences between researchers from high and low-middle income countries.
3. The potential for real or perceived editorial bias in medical science journals in favor of prominent western researchers, and the risk of promoting misplaced credit and/or prestige authorship.
4. Diverse cultural practices and expectations regarding authorship may create conflict between researchers from low-middle and high income countries and contribute to unethical authorship practices.

Addressing Issues on Authorship

1. Undertake further empirical and conceptual research regarding authorship in global health research;
2. Raise awareness on authorship issues in global health research; and
3. Develop specific standards of practice that reflect relevant considerations of authorship in global health research.

Ethical Data Sharing

- Value of data sharing
- Minimizing harm
- Promoting fairness and reciprocity
- Trust

Value of Data Sharing

- Attitudes were typically more cautious
- Support for data sharing often grew as researchers became familiar with the concepts involved, the potential advantages of sharing, and safeguards that could be implemented to address concerns.

Minimizing Harm

- De-identification of data was not necessarily considered sufficient in itself to minimize the risk of harm.
- Risks of harm were associated both with the sensitivity of the data sets collected and with the uses that could be made of the data.
- There was also concern about secondary research with de-identified data contributing to the stigmatization of identifiable communities, populations, and even countries.

Promoting Fairness and Reciprocity

- The importance of ensuring that data-sharing practices did not increase existing inequalities was considered fundamental - the need for data sharing to be ethical and equitable.

Trust

- The importance to researchers, communities and the wider public of ensuring that data were shared in both a trusted and trustworthy manner
- Data sets, primary researchers, secondary data users, and data-sharing policies and processes all needed to be trusted for effective and ethical data sharing
- Researchers highlighted the need for data-sharing policies and processes that would permit them to fulfill their obligations to research participants.

Ethical Data Sharing: Ways Forward

1. Seeking consent to data sharing
2. Governing data sharing
3. Data sharing policies
4. Capacity building

Summary

- Collaborative research allows researchers to work together to achieve the common goal of producing new scientific knowledge
- There are key factors that can lead to successful collaborations that should be discussed way before the collaboration starts.
- Challenges posed by collaborative research can be overcome by formulating guidelines, processes and policies that address ethical issues.
- Successful international collaborations are possible within the framework of guidelines.