



DRE team members

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Publications:

1. [The challenge of timely, responsive and rigorous ethics review of disaster research: Views of research ethics committee members](#)
2. [Familiar ethical issues amplified: how members of research ethics committees describe ethical distinctions between disaster and non-disaster research.](#)
3. [Real-time Responsiveness for Ethics Oversight During Disaster Research](#)

Publication in preparation: Researchers experiences of ethical challenges in disaster research



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Interviews with research ethics committee members

AIMS:

To better understand

- 1) ethical issues arising in disaster research and its review;
- 2) the implications of these issues for ethics review of disaster research; &
- 3) innovative processes and mechanisms used to review protocols.

METHODS:

Qualitative study using interpretative description methodology.

Semi-structured interviews with 15 REC members who had reviewed disaster research protocols to be conducted in a low or middle income country.

Respondents:

Type of REC	REC affiliated with a university	6
	REC affiliated with a governmental or international organization	7
	For profit REC	1
	Ad hoc committee	1
REC location	High-income country	10
	Low-middle-income country	5
Respondent's role (1 had held two roles)	REC Chair	5
	REC member	7
	REC coordinator or advisor	4

Four key ethical issues were identified as presenting distinctive considerations for disaster research and were described by participants as familiar research ethics issues that were amplified in these contexts:

1. Disaster research has strong social value due to its potential for improving disaster response, but requires a higher level of justification compared to other research settings.
2. Vulnerability is an overarching concern for disaster research ethics, a feature that requires careful and critical appraisal when assessing protocols. Research participants' vulnerabilities frequently change in the aftermath of a disaster and often in unpredictable ways.
3. Distinctive concerns arise for responsibilities of promoting and maintaining safety, confidentiality and data security in insecure or austere environments.
4. Though REC members endorsed the need and usefulness of community engagement, they noted that there are significant challenges in a disaster setting to achieve meaningful community engagement.

What characterizes effective and high quality review of disaster research?

- Through analysis of the interviews, three elements were identified: **Timeliness, Responsiveness and Rigorousness**.
- To provide **timely review** of disaster research, many RECs rely on adaptations of review procedures for urgent protocols. Respondents emphasized that **responsive review** required awareness of and sensitivity to the particularities of disaster settings and disaster research. **Rigorous review** was linked with providing careful assessment of ethical considerations related to the research, as well as ensuring independence of the review process. In the table on the following page we present challenges and strategies related to timely, responsive and rigorous review.



Characteristics of effective ethics review of disaster protocols, and challenges encountered and strategies proposed for achieving timely, responsive and rigorous review

Characteristic	Description	Challenges	Strategies
Timely	Consideration for the temporal urgency of a disaster protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standard operating procedures of many RECs are a difficult fit for urgent protocols - Disruption of RECs following a disaster and/or increased number of protocol submissions 	Develop/ adapt procedures for the review of time-sensitive protocols, e.g. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene ad hoc meetings 2. Conduct review by teleconference or over email 3. Waive deadlines for protocol submission 4. Rank protocols by urgency 5. Have advisors pre-review protocols 6. Review generic versions of protocols prior to disasters
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some protocols, if implemented too early, might lead to re-traumatization or impede relief efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assess if initiation of research can be delayed and still achieve study objectives
Responsive	Consideration for the realities of conducting research in a disaster, and access to knowledge about the locale where the disaster has occurred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Few RECs have had the opportunity to develop expertise in reviewing disaster research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer training for REC members regarding substantive and procedural considerations related to reviewing disaster research protocols - Establish policies and procedures for the review of disaster research
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficult to have knowledge about cultural and social context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of knowledgeable advisors - Develop partnerships between RECs
Rigorous	Careful and independent appraisal of ethical considerations related to the research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Widespread, elevated vulnerability - Need for rapid review - Protocols may be hastily drafted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resist the “pressure of urgency” - Provide careful scrutiny of all protocols
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Authorities or other actors seeking to influence research or research ethics review, particularly in politically unstable contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resist external pressures and maintain independence of REC review

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