

Guidance on ethical considerations in planning and reviewing research studies on sexual and reproductive health in adolescents



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A technical consultation hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) Department of Reproductive Health and Research on the sexual and reproductive health of young adolescents in low- and middle-income countries identified a pressing need for guidance on the ethical and safety issues to consider when conducting research with adolescents.

As follow-up to this meeting, a mapping of the available documents related to ethical considerations for sexual and reproductive health research with adolescents was conducted. Next, researchers and programme planners from high-, middle- and low-income countries were identified to define the key content to be included in the guidance document. Deepa Leah Persad solicited and collated feedback from this group, which included Rajib Acharya, Akin Bankole, Carmen Barroso, Linda-Gail Bekker, Marissa Billowitz, Claire Brindis, Fabian Cataldo, Marinella Della Negra, Jessica Dietrich, Annabel Erulkar, Adesgun Fatusi, Sarah Flicker, Janet Frohlich, Loretta Gavin, Marianne Haslegrave, Shireen Jejeebhoy, Rachel Jones, Susan Kasedde, Sabrina Kitaka, Sonal Mehta, AJ Melnikas, Ramiro Molina Cartes, Busiswe Nkala, Friday Okonofua, Helen Rees, Michael Resnick, John Santelli, Katie Schenk, Vinit Sharma, Renee Sieving, Susheela Singh, Catherine Slack, Ann Strode, Cynthia Summers, Johanne Sundby and Melissa Wallace. Based on the input received, a concept note was prepared.

In consultation with the WHO Ethics Review Committee, Jerome Amir Singh (Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, and Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada) was engaged to draft the document. The first draft was reviewed by a subgroup of the stakeholders consulted earlier, including Akin Bankole, Marinella Della Negra, Lee Fairlie, Lawrence Finer, Loretta Gavin, Shireen Jejeebhoy, Rachel Jones, Sabrina Kitaka, AJ Melnikas, Busiswe Nkala, John Santelli, Vinit Sharma, Susheela Singh, Catherine Slack, Ann Strode, Cynthia Summers and Melissa Wallace. Abha Saxena, Secretary of the WHO Ethics Review Committee, also reviewed the document and obtained inputs from researchers within and outside WHO.

The second draft received comments from researchers involved in the Global Early Adolescent Study, including Omaina El-Gibaly, Eleanor Faur, Caroline Kabiru, Chaohua Lou and Kristien Michielsen, who provided valuable inputs informed by their experiences in the field.

Drawing upon the feedback of these groups, a revised third version of the document was developed. Following a field test in South Africa by Jane Ferguson, the guidance was strengthened further. Pooja Parameshwar and Manahil Siddiqi, two young researchers, reviewed the document and provided input and feedback on the third draft.

Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli from the WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research led the development of the document.

Abbreviations

CIOMS	Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EMA	European Medicines Agency
ICH	International Council for Harmonisation
ILO	International Labour Organization
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

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