

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Attitudes and Perceptions about the Research and Ethics Committee in Kampala, Uganda

Charles BR Ibingira, Joseph Ochieng

Makerere University, School of Biomedical Sciences Department of Anatomy, Kampala, Uganda

ABSTRACT

Background

The Makerere University Faculty of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee reviews and approves more than 100 new research protocols a year, yet its activities had never been evaluated as far as the researchers are concerned.

Methods and results

This was a cross sectional study at Makerere University Faculty of Medicine and Mulago Teaching Hospital. The survey population included all staff involved in research at the post graduate level and faculty.

Most of the respondents agreed that decisions of the REC were binding 53 (75.7%), 15 (21%) hold that were variable and 2 (2.9%) biased. The biased attitudes of researchers regarding protocol review reduces as researchers present more protocols to the REC.

Most of the respondents do agree that the REC makes researchers more aware of ethical issues (52.9%), that ethical review is important for protection of human subjects (55.8%), and that the system of ethical review protects human research participants (65.7%). 48.6% believed that the REC ensures that researchers adhere to elements of the consent process which help to protect the autonomy of research participants. However 51% doubt the ability of the REC to ensure that researchers adhere to elements of the consent process during conduct of research

More than 97% of the respondents believe that the REC is either average or very good, while 2.8% rank it below average.

Conclusion

The Research and Ethics Committee sticks to the scientific design and ethical issues to ensure protection of research participants. Some respondents reported bias during review, delay in approval of protocols as well as lack of follow up of on going research.

However, majority of respondents ranked the committee as average or above average.

Keywords:

Medical ethics, Human Research Ethics, Research Ethics Committee, attitudes, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of research is to generate or contribute to generalisable knowledge that could benefit present and future generations.¹ And because of the need for research as well as the requirement that all research involving humans as participants should meet at least the minimum ethical standards including the respect for the rights and welfare of human participants, many national and international guideline have been developed to facilitate the conduct of research.¹⁻⁵ It is therefore a requirement that all research involving humans as participants undergoes a process of ethical review and approval before enrollment of participants can commence.

Since Makerere University and in particular the Faculty of Medicine conduct a considerable amount of research, the faculty research and ethics committee has been operational for many year. This research and ethics committee is one of the busiest in the country and reviews and approves over 100 new protocols every year. The committee functions both as a scientific as well an ethics committee hence considers both the scientific merit and ethical standards in addition to continuing review.

However, because of the enormous numbers of protocols for review, sometimes researchers may not be left satisfied with the committee's functions and decisions. It is also known that researchers many times do not appreciate the role of such committees.⁶⁻⁷

Hence there was need to evaluate the functioning of the committee as perceived by the researchers

Objective

To evaluate the attitudes and perceptions of the researchers about the research and ethics committee

METHODS

This was a cross sectional study at Makerere University Faculty of Medicine and Mulago Teaching Hospital. The survey population included all staff involved in research at the post graduate level and faculty.

Corresponding author:

Dr. Joseph Ochieng; MBChB, MSc, MHSc(Bioethics); Lecturer
Makerere University, School of Biomedical Sciences,
Department of Anatomy, P.O Box 7072, Kampala, Uganda