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## Ethics of Epidemiological Research

Epidemiological research describes the burden of disease in the given population and forms the basis of public health promotion and disease prevention in population.

Given its importance, epidemiological studies have to be ethically designed and conducted with emphasis on scientific design, ethical review, informed consent and sharing of research burdens and benefits of these studies.

Sharing of benefits of epidemiological studies with the community can present a challenge. Once a health need is identified, how soon can it be addressed (directed)?

Who is responsible to provide the intervention needed?

The study may provide valuable health data, but researchers themselves may not be in a position to deliver the appropriate intervention to the population under study!

Public health policy receives data generated from research, but other factors like finance, human resource, health priorities, and political could influence its response?

The ethical issue is that communities in which studies are done may not receive early intervention or any benefit at all. For example: IDA study and distribution of Iron supplement. Health authority responds after 12 months, so community is unhappy and becomes uncooperative during the subsequent health survey.

*The ethical guidelines of for epidemiological studies:*

- Describe the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence to maximize benefit and minimize harm, respect of autonomy and protection to persons and justice that requires the equitable distribution of the burden and benefits of participation in research.
- The epidemiological studies highlights the importance of community consent, avoidances of social pressure, minimize harm and confidentiality, warns against conflict of interest.
- In epidemiological studies and public health interventions, trust and confidence of community is of primary importance.
- Honest discussion with community leaders, sharing information, keeping promises, timely action, and respective behavior all must engage with community in epidemiological studies.

- Ensure that the studies are responsive to the health needs and the priorities of the population or community in which it is to be carried out
- Any intervention or product developed or knowledge generated will be made reasonably available for the benefit of that population or community.