

The need for integration of health benefits as an ethical challenge in mental health research among low resource populations in India

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Brief description of the research project

- Cohort (n=1526) of participants among children of coal mine workers ages 6 to 23 years
- Part of a larger Indian neurodevelopmental cohort “Consortium on Vulnerability to Externalizing Disorders and Addictions” (cVEDA) (2016 – 2020)
- <https://cveda-project.org/>



Background

- Cohort study
- Children of coal mine workers / mining neighbourhood
- Asansol – Raniganj area of West Bengal
- 16 coal mines
- Male workers known to have a high prevalence of alcohol problems
- Local co-ordinators were engaged to assist participant recruitment



Ethical issues: Conceptualisation of mental health

- Very low level of awareness poses an ethical challenge
- Perceived as social deviations rather than initiation of a disease process
- Possible reason: population struggle with receiving adequate physical health care

Ethical issues: Participant recruitment

- Not perceived as a “disease” and people do not come forward to participate
- Alternate strategies were required to engage
- Management of alcohol problems at primary care level among workers
- Encourage to bring their families



Ethical issues: Adequacy of and collaboration with local health services

- Inadequacy of primary physical and mental health care is a deterrent
- Participants expected treatment advice and medication
- Collaborated with physicians of Eastern Coalfields Ltd.



Ethical issues: Research benefits

- Benefits of research and advancement of knowledge are intangible
- Primary motivation: physician consultation and medications
- Ethically sound population based research creates evidence base
- Helps *locally* relevant and effective treatments for underprivileged populations



Conclusions

- Principles of ethics need to be looked at differently
- Research needs to coordinate with local services to create a bond of trust encouraging participation
- Participation results in awareness about mental health



Recommendations

- Engagement – Awareness, information and knowledge and strategies to engage community
- Maximization of benefits – Integration of health service including basic mental health service

