EASHW TIPS – POWER DYNAMICS IN RESEARCH: WHO HAS A SAY?

C16. IS THERE A POSSIBLE CONTEXT OF INEQUALITY OR POWER IMBALANCE?

This question applies to all studies conducted in contexts of potential power inequalities. It is important to take power dynamics, reciprocity, and ownership into account in **all research involving potential power imbalances, including relationships between researchers and participants, and collaborations between research partners.**

This includes situations in which researchers, participants, or partner institutions may differ in terms of institutional, social, economic, or academic power. **For example, research involving students recruited by their lecturers, or employees recruited by their employers.** Also consider communities where there are high levels of poverty, inequality, or a history of exploitation and oppression, the consequences of which are still felt today. Also think of collaborations with researchers or institutions that occupy a distinctly different hierarchical position.

Research in such contexts must address unique ethical concerns, such as:

- POWER DYNAMICS: Can there be potential power inequalities between researchers, partners and/or participants? Could these inequalities affect voluntary participation, the freedom to withdraw, or the ability to express disagreement?
- RECIPROCITY AND OWNERSHIP: Who benefits from the research, and who has control over its design and outcomes?

YES to question 16 = Potential power inequalities may be at play, so a reflection is required. For this reflection answer the following questions **that are relevant to your study. Keep your answers brief and focus on how you will address potential power imbalances.**

Research in such contexts must address unique ethical concerns, such as:

- POWER DYNAMICS: Can there be potential power inequalities between researchers, partners and/or participants?
- RECIPROCITY AND OWNERSHIP: **Who benefits** from the research, and who has control over its design and outcomes?

NO to question 16 = You have considered potential power imbalances not only from your own perspective, but also from the perspective of research partners, colleagues, and participants. You have concluded that there are no relevant power inequalities that could affect the ethical conduct of your study, including how freely others may feel able to participate, disagree, or withdraw.

YES to question 16 = inequalities may be at play, so a reflection is recommended. For this reflection answer the following questions:

1. How was this project developed? Who was involved in determining the research agenda, the design, and the implementation? Was this done collaboratively, and how was equity built into the process?
   - Was the research agenda created collaboratively?
   - Did all partners have equal input in shaping the study's design and implementation?

2. What is the potential added value of this study's findings for all researchers and institutions involved?
   - What benefits will the research bring to all researchers/institutions involved?
   - Ethical research should provide value beyond shared publications.
3. What BENEFITS does the research offer to the various (non-academic) population groups that are involved?
   - Are there tangible outcomes for participants or their communities (e.g., healthcare insights, economic benefits, or empowerment)?
   - Research should not extract information without offering meaningful contributions to the communities involved.
4. How do you ensure that all partners and participants A VOICE IN the DECISION-MAKING process?
   - What mechanisms are in place to involve relevant local partners in key decisions?
   - How do you ensure their voices are respected and heard throughout the study?
   - Equal partnership helps reduce exploitation and builds ethical research relationships.
   - How do you ensure that participants can freely decline or withdraw without pressure or negative consequences?
5. How do you ensure EQUAL EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS?
   - Will you share findings, methods, or training with all researchers and/or communities?
   - How will knowledge flows benefit all partners equally?
   - Ethical research avoids "one-way" knowledge extraction and promotes mutual learning.
6. How do you take into account the LONG-TERM consequences for all parties involved?
   - Consider the study's lasting impact on participants, communities, and researchers.
   - Will your findings create unintended harm or benefit certain groups disproportionately?
   - Ethical research evaluates the ripple effects of its outcomes.
7. How will you deal with UNCONSCIOUS BIASES, assumptions, and possible power dynamics, such as 'savior syndrome' or feelings of superiority?
   - Reflect on how unconscious biases, savior syndrome, or feelings of superiority could affect your interactions and results.
   - Include plans to mitigate these risks through cultural sensitivity training or other methods.
   - Addressing bias ensures respectful and fair treatment of all participants.
8. HOW DO YOU MONITOR, EVALUATE AND REPORT any ethical violations and power imbalances?
   - Have you put systems in place to identify and address ethical violations or power imbalances during the study?
   - Will you report findings transparently to local communities and stakeholders?
   - Active monitoring ensures accountability and safeguards participants' rights.