



Challenges of conducting ethical research in a remote, fragile region of Southeast Asia

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Challenges of conducting ethical research in a remote, fragile region of Southeast Asia

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Introduction

We set out to evaluate midwifery education and training, currently being delivered in one of the most remote, fragile regions of Southeast Asia. The challenges have been robust, including ethical issues, language barriers, internet access and being attuned to local sensitivities. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing political instability within the region have contributed to unexpected layers of complexity. We discuss some solutions, referring to key guidance (UK Research and Innovation, UNICEF, 2021).

Stages of data collection



Stage 1: identify current level of education (documentary analysis/interviews with educators)



Stage 2: explore student experiences and perception of education (focus groups)



Stage 3: assess the preparedness of medics in the field (diaries)

Ethical considerations (guided by UK Research and Innovation, UNICEF, 2021)

Before study

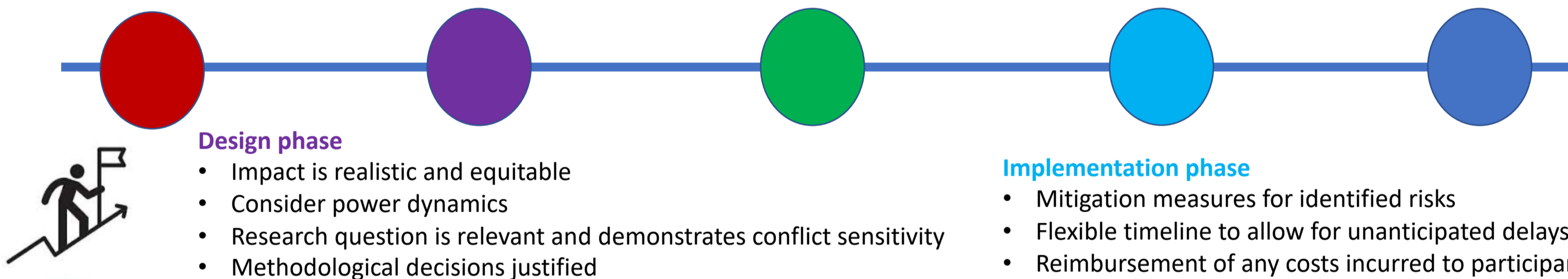
- Engage local knowledge
- Ensure researchers have the relevant skill set

Ethics

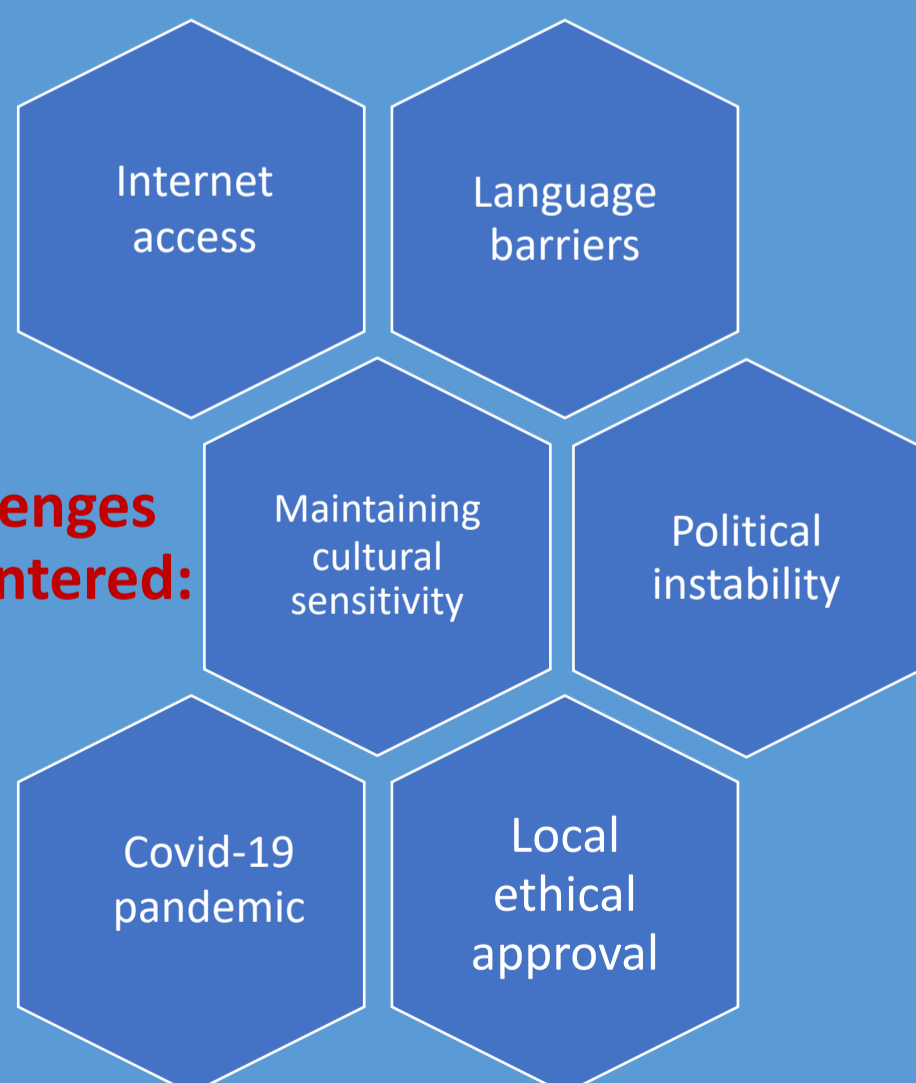
- Research transparency
- Sufficient provision for protection of confidentiality and privacy
- Address situations where confidentiality may need to be breached
- Ensure informed consent

Dissemination phase

- Safeguarding researchers and participants
- Protecting participants identify
- Ensure outputs are equitably created to benefit local, country and international levels



Challenges encountered:



Solutions

- Maintaining cultural sensitivity:** engagement with key stakeholders. Pilot studies assessed level of burden. Research questions demonstrate conflict sensitivity and strict adherence to confidentiality.
- Internet access:** additional time for interviews. In response to restricted internet access a change from online to in person focus groups (facilitated by educators on the medic program).
- Language barriers:** participants have a good grasp of the English language; however, an interpreter will be available at request, in recognition of dialect differences.
- Political instability:** various safety measures were put in place to mitigate potential harm to participants and researchers. A flexible approach to data collection was taken.
- Covid 19 pandemic:** face to face data collection was conducted in line with government regulations and guidelines on social distancing.
- Local ethical approval:** facilitated by the Southeast Asia research lead for the wider project.

Key messages

- ❖ Building strong relationships is key
- ❖ Engaging local knowledge ensures the study is contextually relevant and feasible
- ❖ A flexible approach to data collection is required

Reference

Groves-Williams, L, Shanks, K and Berman G. 2021 "Ethical Research in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts: Guidelines for Reviewers" UNICEF and UKRI

