



Conference Report:

International Conference on the Ethical Considerations in Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children 25th September, 2019, Taipei

With the financial support of:



1. Conference Agenda

09:00-09:20	<p>Opening Address Dr. Fu-Yuan, Peng, Director-General, K-12 Education Administration, Ministry of Education Ms. Li-Feng Lee, Legislator, Legislative Yuan Mr. Robbert van den Berg, Executive Director, ECPAT International Prof. Jack Shi-Ming Huang, Dean for Research and Development, National Chung Cheng University Mr. Hsuan-Ying Kao, Chair of ECPAT Taiwan</p>
09:20-10:20	<p>Research Ethics Systems: Lessons from a Comparison between NGO Ethics Guidelines and University Ethics Procedures Moderator: Prof. Jack Shi-Ming Huang, Dean for Research and Development, National Chung Cheng University Speaker: Dr. Mark Capaldi, Lecturer, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University</p>
10:20-10:40	Tea Break
10:40-11:40	<p>Research Ethics of Studies on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Taiwan Moderator: Prof. Mei-Hwan Wu, Superintendent, National Taiwan University Children Hospital Speaker: Prof. Amy Huey-Ling Shee, Director, Centre for Human Research Ethics, National Chung Cheng University</p>
11:40-12:10	<p>Open Discussions I Dr. Mark Capaldi, Lecturer, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University/ Prof. Amy Huey-Ling Shee, Director, Centre for Human Research Ethics, National Chung Cheng University</p>
12:10-13:10	Lunch
13:10-14:10	<p>Draft Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children Moderator: Ms. Ingrid Pi-Ying Liao, Vice-Chair of ECPAT Taiwan Speaker: Dr. Mark Kavenagh, Head of Research and Policy, ECPAT International Discussant: Prof. Li-Chen Cheng, Director, Research Ethics Office of National Taiwan University</p>
14:10-15:20	<p>Field Test on Draft Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children Moderator: Dr. Tufail Muhammad, President, The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) Presenters: 1. Zimbabwe: Mr. Maxim Murungweni, Programmes Manager, Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children 2. India: Ms. Joyatri Ray, Director, Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS) 3. Taiwan: Ms. Chia-Wei Lin, Project Coordinator, ECPAT Taiwan Discussant: Prof. Chih-Hsiung Chen, Member, Research Ethics Committee for Human Subject Protection, National Chiao Tung University</p>

15:20-15:40	Tea Break
15:40-16:20	<p>Roundtable Forum and Open Discussions</p> <p>Moderator: Prof. Bernard Kao, International Board of Trustees Representative of East Asia, ECPAT International</p> <p>Theme: Do we need an internationally recognized Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation involving Children?</p> <p>Discussants:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Tufail Muhammad, President, ISPCAN 2. Dr. Ming Nan Lin, Vice Chairperson, Institutional Human Research Ethics Committee of National Chung Cheng University 3. Dr. Mark Capaldi, Lecturer, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University 4. Dr. Mark Kavenagh, Head of Research and Policy, ECPAT International
16:20-16:50	Open Discussions II
16:50-17:00	Closing Ceremony

2. Conference Content:

The International Conference on the Ethical Consideration in Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children was held in GIS NTU Convention Center in Taipei on 25th September, 2019. This conference invited experts on research ethics and field workers from the child protection sector from around the world, including Australia, India, Pakistan, Taiwan, the Netherlands, the UK and Zimbabwe. There were over 80 participants, including social workers, non-governmental organization (NGO) workers, and researchers in attendance. The conference presented crucial concepts of ethical concerns on Sexual Exploitation of Children (SEC), and draft Guidelines for ethical research with such groups that was developed by the ECPAT working group on ethics during 2019. Furthermore, lessons from field-tested experience on using the draft guidelines were shared with the audience. The purpose of this conference was to provide the core value of research ethics on the study of SEC to NGOs, social workers, and researchers.

Keynote Speech I: Research Ethics Systems: Lessons from a Comparison between NGO ethics Guidelines and University Ethics Procedures

Speaker: Dr. Mark Capaldi, Lecturer, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University

Dr. Capaldi first introduced difficulties of ethical concerns that SEC researchers have. Nowadays, many NGOs conduct primary data collection for the need of assessment, monitoring and evaluating. However, NGOs face three ethical dilemmas:

- 1) Do child participants have enough knowledge to understand the research purpose?
- 2) Is there a power imbalance between researchers and participants: Are children able to reject the research?
- 3) Repeated interviews and research fatigue may have a negative effect on participants.

Due to these difficulties and challenges, ECPAT International, ECPAT Taiwan and National Chung Cheng University cooperated to work on guidelines for SEC research. Dr. Capaldi compared NGO ethics guidelines with the review process in the Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University. The university emphasizes:

- 1) The power relationship between researchers and participants;
- 2) The politics of research, including sponsorship and any potential conflict of interest;
- 3) Risk Classification table. The advisory committee in the university can provide support and assist to analyze risk versus benefit in research proposals. On the other hand, guidelines for SEC research provides an ethical tasks checklist, managing disclosure, and harms and benefits table.

Moreover, the core concept of research ethics on vulnerable groups should involve NGOs. Dr. Capaldi suggested that NGO workers could take ethics training courses and cooperate with academia to enhance the quality of research on SEC. Nevertheless, Dr. Capaldi found that when researchers create supportive and enabling environments during research, children may feel empowered and participating in the research may be therapeutic.

Keynote Speech II: Research Ethics of Studies on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Taiwan

Speaker: Prof. Amy Huey-Ling Shee, Director, Centre for Human Research Ethics, National Chung Cheng University

SEC has long been a major research topic in the name of understanding and offsetting the involved human right issues. Owing to the work of research ethics committees IBR/REC in hospitals and academic institutions, the vulnerabilities of child participants become major concerns for conducting SEC studies. In Taiwan, the principle of “Do No Harm” draws special attentions of IRBs/RECs to safeguard children in SEC research. In practice, minimizing risks and appropriate remedies are ensured before the issuing of a

Certificate to Conduct Research (the Certificate). However, SEC research projects are free from ethical review if it is not done for grants, degrees or publications. On the other hand, with the Certificate in hand, it is up to the knowledge and sensitivities of the researcher to comply with “Do No Harm” guidelines, despite the possibilities that violations may be found by authorities to impose penalties.

In 2017, a joint project of SEC research ethics was initiated by ECPAT International, National Chung Cheng University and ECPAT Taiwan for the awareness-raising and field practice within ECPAT and beyond. A thorough literature review was first conducted to share knowledge in the working group, from which the “Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children” was drafted and distributed among ECPAT families and friends. Both comments and field tests have been called upon to examine the practicability of the Guideline. It is the wishful thinking of the project partners to disseminate the spirit of the Guideline into the hearts of SEC researchers all over the world.

This presentation takes on my experiences as a long-term SEC researcher and a child rights advocate as well as an IRB/REC reviewer and administrator. In the field I have worked with people who eat and sleep with child welfare in mind, though it becomes difficult to safeguard SEC child victims/survivors from SEC research when we act as researchers or gatekeepers. In the IRBs/RECs I have been facing project applicants who argue against the review because it makes their research difficult to proceed with. In order to conduct a SEC study to follow research ethics, we need knowledge, sensitivities, and most importantly, willingness to make the research even more difficult to conduct under the do-no-harm principle. With a mind to promote SEC research and a heart to care for child participants, I propose to set up a “network of child ombudspersons” to work together with IRBs/RECs, which is composed of court-appointed *guardian ad litem* of the child victim/survivor, representatives from SEC multi-stakeholders, and case supervisors representing child protection associations.

Open Discussions I:

Questions raised in this open discussion.

- 1) How do countries which do not have a strong legal framework oversight research with vulnerable groups, such as survivors of SEC and human trafficking?
- 2) Can adult survivors who participate in the research actually benefit from such experiences – finding it an opportunity to recover through the research process?
- 3) How do low-income countries which do not have funds or mechanism to set up

ethical reviews review or check projects?

Answers:

1) UN sustainable development goals have set child protection goals in all countries, including developing countries and most have set up child protection bodies to secure the right of children in those countries. These can be mechanisms supported to improve research oversight for vulnerable groups such as these.

2) Research and psychological treatment are different areas but have alignments. Done properly, engagement in research can in fact be an opportunity for elements of survivors' recovery. The right to participate and engage in the discourse about an issue that has heavily affected you can certainly bring benefits. This must be done psychologically, and physically safe circumstances, but the potential therapeutic benefit should not be ignored.

3) ECPAT International sees the gap and value of establishing a global mechanism for research ethics review and help desk for such SEC research around the world.

In this session, an audience member who had been a participant of SEC research shared her experience in this conference. She mentioned that she felt very uncomfortable when the researchers had used their own perspectives to describe child research participants (i.e. 'as engaging in sex work' rather than as victims of abuse), and even used the participants response to confirm their hypothesis' that labelled the participants in a certain way. These experiences led her to think how researchers look at participants in research. Professor Shee invited the audience member to connect with ECPAT Taiwan for an opportunity to speak about such an experience in future advocacy.

Session I: Draft Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children

Speaker: Dr. Mark Kavenagh, Head of Research and Policy, ECPAT International

Discussant: Prof. Li-Chen Cheng, Director, Research Ethics Office of National Taiwan University

Draft guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children were presented in this session. Dr. Kavenagh mentioned that using "involving children" means that children and youth are not only being participants but also sometimes may be co-researchers. ECPAT International, as the leading campaign on ending SEC around the world found out that the research of SEC without carefully planning may

cause harm to child participants. Therefore, ECPAT International cooperates with ECPAT Taiwan and National Chung Cheng University in Taiwan in 2019 on a project to work on guidelines for SEC research to try and influence the quality of future research.

The guidelines provide the three-step process and ethical tasks that guide researchers to analyze harm and benefit in SEC research. Dr. Kavenagh mentioned that whether children should even participate in the research in the first place should be considered properly in the beginning of research designs. Because sensitive issues may arise during research, the methodology, informed consent and the ages of participants are the major tasks that researchers should consider in making this decision. Moreover, a range of ethical tasks to consider are detailed in the guidelines in designing research on SEC involving children. These include tasks related to methodology, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, disclosures and payment and compensation. The researcher could use these tasks to review their research proposals and make improvements and amendments to reduce the potential risk to child research participants. Finally, the table of harm and benefit analysis in the third step of the guidelines assists researchers to identify and assess potential effects of the research.

Professor Cheng, the discussant in this session noticed that children's competency that they can understand whole research information should also be considered when making decisions about research participants. Moreover, we cannot ignore the rights of children to withdraw from the research at any time. Finally, how to handle mandatory reporting and episodes of re-traumatization are the important tasks that should be planned carefully for in SEC research.

Field Test on Draft Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation Involving Children

Presenters:

1. Zimbabwe: Mr. Maxim Murungweni, Programmes Manager, Zimbabwe National Council for the Welfare of Children
2. India: Ms. Joyatri Ray, Director, Equitable Tourism Options (EQUATIONS)
3. Taiwan: Ms. Chia-Wei Lin, Project Coordinator, ECPAT Taiwan

Discussant: Prof. Chih-Hsiung Chen, Member, Research Ethics Committee for Human Subject Protection, National Chiao Tung University

Mr. Murungweni presented his field-test of the draft guidelines in Zimbabwe. He mentioned that the draft guidelines led him to consider whether children should participate in the research or not. As a result, one of the researchers found that he

could use other resources, such as secondary documents to collect data. Moreover, harms and benefits analysis helped him to identify any possible harms in the research so that he could mitigate these potential effects in advance.

Ms. Ray introduced her project called “Assessing vulnerability of children in tourism locations” which is a child led project in India. This project included an element that explicitly tested what ‘ethics in research’ practically meant to children during its design phase. Ms. Ray found out that child consent is sometimes manipulated in reality. It is power, dependency and the promise to provide safety which may influence consent of children. Moreover, confidentiality may not be easy to maintain in the research in a real sense in small communities, particularly when group based data collection mechanisms (which are common) are used. One benefit identified for child researchers was gaining experience from the research itself. Children mentioned that their participation can help to eliminate stereotypes of migrants and result in positive action.

Ms. Lin presented her Taiwan project in this conference. This project set up a model project in line with research ethics. Therefore, she wrote a research proposal and submitted it to REC from Chung Cheng University and to global experts for review to see what feedback would be received. There are two findings that came from her process. Firstly, third party experts such as social workers should review the proposal first to evaluate the appropriateness of the research design. Secondly, support systems should be explained clearly that would be used when trauma led by the research happens. Ms. Lin suggested that researchers should not only go through the guidelines, but also submit them to the REC committee which can fully protect the right of child participants.

Professor Chen, the discussants in this session, raised three questions after listening to the three field-tested projects:

1. If the research is not beneficial to the child, can we tolerate these studies if they are considered to be high risk research?
2. If only one parent agrees to do the research, what should the researcher do? Should we need both parents to agree or not?
3. The definition of support system is still unclear. Does this support system provide further support to the participants to deal with trauma after research?

Roundtable Forum and Open Discussions

Theme: Do we need an internationally recognized Guidelines for Ethical Research on Sexual Exploitation involving Children?

Discussants:

1. Dr. Tufail Muhammad, President, ISPCAN
2. Dr. Ming Nan Lin, Vice Chairperson, Institutional Human Research Ethics Committee of National Chung Cheng University
3. Dr. Mark Capaldi, Lecturer, Institute of Human Rights and Peace Studies, Mahidol University
4. Dr. Mark Kavenagh, Head of Research and Policy, ECPAT International

Dr. Muhammad mentioned that ethical principles can provide full concepts to help researchers to protect children. He stressed that providing for informed consent from each participant, including parents, guardians and children, and how researchers deal with power relationships in the research are key tasks that should be raised in SEC research. Moreover, Dr. Muhammad and Dr. Lin both noticed that it is difficult to make guidelines international because each country has their own culture and system. On the other hand, Dr. Lin explained that the core principle of ethical concerns on SEC studies still can be used globally.

Dr. Capaldi took the example of “Terminology Guidelines for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse” which ECPAT International released before. The guidelines created a great influence on global society which it is seen as reliable source for NGOs. It can be the positive example of the guidelines. He also stressed that how NGOs cooperate with academia is important to success in a task such as this. Hopefully the guidelines will be a popular research tool for SEC researchers.

Dr. Kavenagh mentioned that he hoped the guidelines will be more accessible to use in SEC research widely. Additionally, he noticed that the “Do No Harm” principle expressed in the draft guidelines may need toning down as there is still potential harm in SEC research – something like “minimize Harm” or “appropriately balance harms and benefits” may be more suitable.

The next step for the guidelines is to disseminate to INGOs, NGOs and other societies. It would also be useful to set up a Help Desk in the future to assist researchers on the

studies of SEC.

Open Discussions II:

Questions raised in the discussions were:

- 1) Researchers in many countries may not receive education on research ethics issue. How to implement the guidelines in the field work would be the major challenge?
- 2) If the participants or guardians do not want to sign the informed consent form, what should researchers do?

Answer:

- 1) Dr. Capaldi answered that he was aware of this barrier when he interviewed NGO staff. He mentioned that we can build the bridge between NGOs and academia.
- 2) Professor Shee said that if the researcher cannot gain the informed consent from participants or guardians, the researcher cannot continue to do the research. They must gain these two agreements so that they can continue the research.