The Role of Research Frontline Staff in Promoting Research Integrity

Kombe, FK: EthiXPERT, ARIN, UKZN, Wellcome

INTRODUCTION

- **Research frontline staff:** Health research workers employed to support researchers in seeking informed consent, collect data and simple non-invasive biological samples.
- **Role:** They play a critical role in operationalisation of health research ethics guidelines
- **Justification:** Previous work focused on ethical challenges they face. Their role in research integrity is understudied
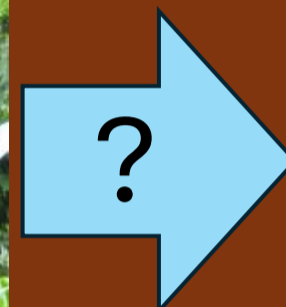- **Aim:** The study aimed at filling this gap

Credit-KWTP

OBJECTIVES

Credit-KWTP

Credit:William Hoffman

Explore how research frontline staff's values, perceptions and practices could influence research integrity in a low-and-middle-income setting

METHODOLOGY

- Two research institutions each in East and Southern Africa purposively selected
- Individual in-depth interviews and non-participant observations
- Data were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically using Nvivo 12.0.

FINDING

N=Individual Indepth Interviews-22; Non-Participant Observations-8

Values and perceptions
- **Engagement:** Lack of involvement in planning and co-creation
- **Welfare:** Fragmented structures, lack of strategic systems for addressing welfare and challenges faced. *"Sometimes, you raise the concerns to the people concerned to your superiors, sometimes they do, they do respond positively other times, of course, you don't receive positive feedback"*
- **Supervision and support-** Impersonal and focused on work targets and outputs *"Fieldworkers are working under threat that if I don't do this, I am going to be sacked "*
- **Capacity building-** Unstructured/undefined systems for strategic/ongoing support. *"If you are not at the top [laughs] unless you are very keen on your personal career growth! you can sit in your comfort zone.*
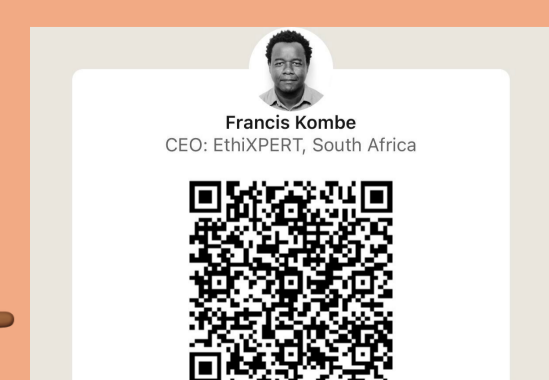
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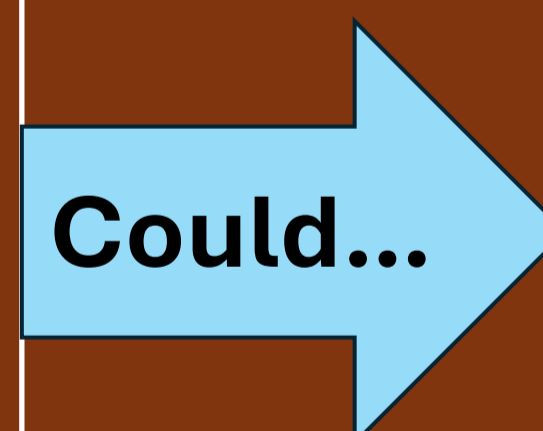
Implications for practices
- **Undervalued:** Feeling, inferior. *"There are issues related to relationship with supervisors, most fieldworkers are under-recognized,"*
- **Aversion:** Dislike, lacking sense of belonging, commitment & ownership. *"Motivation is not there...a few fieldworkers actually own the job"*
- Power distance- Inability to express concerns, inferiority complex. *"...Such things,it's better for you to remain quiet than expressing yourself...you just say, ok yes boss, its ok boss....no but"*
- **Questionable Research Practices-**Corner cutting, "cooking data", "white lies. *"a fieldworker falsified data because of the pressure they were receiving to meet specific targets by specific dates" "*

CONCLUSION

- **Environment-**Institutional environment could influence data collectors' practices

- **Inclusivity-**Data collectors' engagement and involvement (co-creation) in research planning may enhance their commitment and sense of ownership

- **Mentorship, supervision and support-** wholistic support (welfare and wellbeing) beyond work targets and outputs?
- Further research needed to explore the most effective model for supporting fieldworkers