

## **Embedding social science research around Volunteer Infection studies**

By Sunderarajan Padmanabhan

New Delhi, March 24: Decisions on ‘health’ in public health cannot be taken without the agreement and approval of communities. Engaging communities whose health, public health research is striving to improve is, thus, critical. This can be accomplished by building relationships and trust with communities (the ‘public’ in public health). There are a number of studies that have demonstrated that effectiveness of public health interventions depends on learnings from social and behavioural sciences.

Realizing the pertinence of embedding social science research around health science research involving humans as participants, THSTI brought in social science researchers from India, Kenya (KEMRI Wellcome Trust conducted the Shigella Human Infection Studies at Kilifi) and UK to be a part of discussions around human infection studies or Controlled Human Infection Model (CHIM) studies.

The discussions were led by Prof. Gagandeep Kang, Executive Director, THSTI and a physician researcher who has worked extensively with communities for almost two decades now. She said that findings from similar studies done in Kenya and UK make us realize that communities find the concept difficult to understand. Attitude and perception studies (on low income communities, investigating payment and compensation aspects etc.) do and will help identify the concerns of the various stakeholders – policymakers, communities and individuals.

What motivates people to participate? What do we need to do to make sure consent is truly informed? How much do we know the community that is participating in the study? Why you are doing the research you are doing? How to build trust with volunteers who are involved in the study? These (and more) are the questions that will be answered and need to be for any public health investigation to ensure the marriage between ‘public’ and ‘health’ stays for long. “The way forward is to have social science and engagement studies alongside policy deliberations for CHIM studies”, concluded Dr. Gagandeep.

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