Seteney Shami , Moushira Elgeziri

Seteney Shami , Moushira Elgeziri

Project Title:	**Research Ethics Discourses, Practices, and Leadership in MENA**
IDRC Grant Number:	**109341-001**
By:	**Seteney Shami and Moushira Elgeziri**
Report Type:	**Final report**
Project Duration:	**February 2020 – August 2024**
Period covered by the report:	**February 2020-August 2024**
Date:	**September 25, 2024**
Country/Region:	**Arab region**
Full Name of Institution:	**The Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS)**
Address of Research Institution:	**John Kennedy Street, Ain El Mereisseh, Alamuddin Building, Floor 2.**
Name of Researchers:	**Seteney Shami, Moushira Elgeziri**
Contact Information of Researchers	**Seteney Shami (shami@theacss.org); Moushira Elgeziri (elgeziri@theacss.org)**

1. Executive Summary

This is the final report for the IDRC grant to the ACSS under the aforementioned title. In this report we provide an overview of the activities undertaken during the grant period from February 2020 to August 2024. We also share reflections on what we have learned: both about existing capacities, and modalities that work well and others that don't, in addition to what is needed to strengthen the position of the ACSS as an institution poised to become a central resource for research ethics in the Arab region.

2. Research Problem

Despite the importance of research ethics for social science research, the Arab region suffers a visible dearth in knowledge about and training in this key area. The ACSS long experience in this domain has demonstrated the lack of culturally and contextually sensitive frameworks to guide research ethics. Most of what we know is adopted from Western standards and practices that do not speak to local contexts and it has been widely discussed in the literature how concepts and protocols of research ethics are heavily influenced by health and biomedical models to the neglect of the social sciences and humanities. These standards are also unable to respond to the different emerging vulnerabilities and sensitivities associated with the multiple crises in the Arab region, including wars, conflicts and displacements. On the other hand, there is a noticeable interest in questions of ethics, especially among the younger generation of social scientists but also from universities and research institutions and much keenness to learn how to address ethical conundrums especially those that are complex and not straightforward. It is for the above reasons that the ACSS has focused on ethics training, knowledge production and networking and envisages for itself a key role in the future as the go to source of information on this vital but neglected area.

3. General and Specific Objectives

The IDRC grant was to allow three leading educational institutions: the American University of Beirut, Birzeit University and the ACSS to undertake complementary activities that would allow them to ultimately become regional resources for research ethics in the Arab region: AUB mapped existing ethical practices and processes in select Arab universities, while Birzeit designed and developed a portal on research ethics and ACSS undertook a number of regional activities for research and training on research ethics.

The general objective of the grant was to spread the culture of research ethics among researchers in the Arab region and encourage - especially the young generation of scholars - to develop an understanding of and respect for the rights of research participants in the research process and beyond, as well as the rights of the researcher to protection and integrity. It also sought to encourage researchers to take back what they have learned to their institutions and to leverage for change in academic practices and institutional cultures to ensure ethical approaches to research involving human subjects.

For ACSS, the specific outlined objectives were:

1. To provide regional researchers with essential knowledge, tools, resources, and competencies, to apply ethical standards in their research and encourage them to exchange ideas on ethical conundrums and reflect with colleagues on issues at stake and how to find solutions.
2. To promote the field of research ethics as an arena for reflection and theorizing.
3. To encourage the new generation of scholars to produce locally embedded and culturally relevant ethical principles to guide research in the Arab region.

4. Methodology:

In order to fulfil the above objectives, the ACSS planned a work methodology that focused on the following:

1. Training on research ethics: ACSS planned four training sessions over the grant's duration.
2. Small grants on research ethics: We proposed to organize three cycles over the grant period.
3. Convenings: The ACSS proposed to organize sessions on research ethics at its biennial conference and the research forum. The plan was to convene three such events over the four-year duration of the grant.

The ACSS training and convening activities went according to plan and even exceeded the promised targets while the small grants program on research ethics underwent some significant but rewarding changes. Originally the grants program was planned to be three cycles of individual grants targeting previous ACSS grantees and fellows who would apply to do additional work on their previous projects, to enhance the ethical dimension of their work and reflect upon it. Two cycles were held and five grants were given. At this point, ACSS project leaders felt that we had reached a saturation point in terms of supporting individuals as well as a pressing need to work more on enhancing the capacities of research institutions. To this end, the last cycle of the small grants was dedicated to institutional grants, and six grants were given out. To enhance impact, it was decided to focus on institutions in Jordan and Palestine but to include a broad array of institutions, including universities, research NGOs, and civil society (development and advocacy) organizations. The decision to focus on Jordan and Palestine was partly to ensure compatibility and comparability in the issues faced by the grantee institutions and thus enable a common language and dialogue to emerge through the meetings and discussions. It was also informed by the findings of the AUB team and the meeting they held in Amman, which showed that there was already a debate on these issues in academic institutions in Jordan.

5. Project implementation and management

Over the entire grant period, the ACSS developed and consolidated a research ethics team including Rebecca Daher from Grants and Fellowship who has been in charge of programmatic and financial aspects of the grants; Joanne Boustany, research coordinator, whose contribution revolved around the organization of workshops both in terms of substance and content and reviewing grantees' narrative reports. Tamara Tell, a web developer. is now playing a larger role in designing and posting on the ethics platform. While Moushira Elgeziri, associate director has been closely supervising the three staff members, Seteney Shami, director general, has provided overall supervision and oversight of the entire project.

Primary activities:

Training

We have been able to sustain the ACSS training on ethics as well as one-on-one mentorship in almost all ACSS programs. Research ethics are now an integral part of the ACSS work and we now require applicants to address questions on ethics in all grant and fellowship applications.

Under the grant, the following training activities were undertaken:

- In April and May 2021 RGP 8 "Health and Livelihoods" grantees participated in a training on research ethics instructed by Jamil Mouawad.

- The ACSS first academy that took place in July 2021 included a session on research ethics in the social sciences.

- A training session on ethics was held for Research on the Arts (RAP) grantees in September 2021

- Training on research ethics was organized for the four grantees of the first cycle of SGP grants for individuals on the "Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas" in March 2022

- A training session on ethics was held in April 2022 for RGP 9 grantees working on Health and Livelihoods in the Arab Region.

- Grantees of the first Small Grants Cycle on the Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas participated in the Fourth ACSS Research Forum in June 2022 in Beirut. They presented their projects and received feedback from other participants.

- A training session on ethics was held in June 2022 for the New Paradigm Factory (NPF) fellows

- A training session was organized for the second cycle of the SGP for individuals on "Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas" on September 8, 2022

- Research Grants Program – RGP 7 on "Health and Livelihood in the Arab Region: Wellbeing, Vulnerability and Conflict" grantees participated in an online session to present their projects and ethical dilemmas and receive feedback from peers and members of the selection committee. This took place on July 2, 2021.

- The New Generation of Social Scientists (NewGen) are receiving a mandatory on-line course on "Critical Methodologies" for its BA and MA fellows within which they received a four-week module on research ethics. The course has been offered three times as of now.

- A training workshop entitled "Ethics of Social Research: Institutional Protocols and Practices" was organized for Palestinian and Jordanian institutions in Amman on March 18-20, 2023

- A work in progress workshop was organized in Amman on January 24-25, 2024 for recipients of the institutional grants from Jordan and Palestine.

- Recipients of institutional grants from Jordan and Palestine participated in the ACSS Fifth Research Forum from April 15-17, 2024.

Convenings and consultations:

In year one of the grant the ACSS was unable to organize convenings due to the Covid outbreak, but we did include our project partners from AUB, Jihad Makhoul and Rima Nakkash, among the selection committee of the first cycle of the small grants program for individual grants under the "Initiative for Ethical Dilemmas".

All along the grant duration, all three institutions were mostly informed of each others' activities and plans and ACSS made sure to invite both partners to major events.

Below are these events:

-Roundtable on "Research Ethics: Approaches and Implementation" held at the ACSS Sixth conference on May 26, 2023 and attended by the three partner institutions: ACSS, Birzeit University and AUB. The roundtable was moderated by the ACSS and the three institutions shared some of their project findings. The session was also attended by Chaitali Sinha and Roula El Rifai from IDRC.

-Side meeting for the three partner institutions with IDRC at the ACSS Sixth Conference on May 26, 2023 to update each other on different project activities.

-The ACSS was invited to participate in the AUB workshop on research ethics in Amman. Mapping Drivers, Capacities and Needs for Research Ethics in the Middle East and North Africa – Amman, January 2023.

-Birzeit invited the ACSS and its researchers to visit the Birzeit ethics training platform and test the site and send comments. Feedback was sent directly to Birzeit

-Judy Makhoul IDRC project co-leader at AUB was invited to speak at the ACSS Research Forum in June 2022 on the AUB ethics study and share the results of their multi country findings.

-A session was designated for Birzeit to share their portal on research ethics to interested participants at the ACSS 2023 conference.

Research Grants

Over the grant duration, the ACSS organized three research grants cycles: Two for individuals and one for institutions as explained above. Below is a description of the grants:

Cycle 1: Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas - four grants

> -Mai Abu Moghli, Palestine, fieldwork
> Title: the ethics of conducting research in Palestine: Between institutionalization and the power of practice.
>
> -Fouzia Borj, Morocco, reflection paper
> Title: Beyond respect of participants in fieldwork: Requirements of building ethical relations in conflict situation
>
> -Faten Mbarek, Tunisia, fieldwork
> Title: Fieldwork and power relations in research community
>
> -Noha Atef, Egypt, reflection paper
> Title: Dealing ethically with power relations between researcher and researched: In-depth interviews with teenagers and youth

Cycle 2: Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas - two grants

- Mouloud Amghar, Morocco.
  Title: Paying back to the community: from scientific to social responsibility

- Abdeslam Badr, Morocco[1]
  Title: A retrospect on mismanagements of power-relation dynamics in research context and way forward

Cycle 3: Ethics of Social Research: Institutional Protocols and Practices- six grants

Insaniyyat: Society of Palestinian Anthropologists, Palestine (project leader: Laura Adwan)

An-Najah University, Palestine (project leader: Samah Saleh)

Jordan University for Science and Technology, Jordan (project leader: Omar Khabour)

Al-Quds University's Faculty of Law, Palestine (project leader: Munir Nusseibah)

The Royal Scientific Society of Jordan, Jordan (project leader: Yara Shaban)

Jerusalem Center for Women, Palestine (project leader: Luna Orikat)

---

[1] The grant was not activated because grantee did not respond satisfactorily to queries of selection committee

Other activities: Commissiong papers, developing the ethics website and undertaking project evaluation:

1) Commissioning think-pieces/ articles on research ethics in the Arab region

The following papers have been commissioned:

-Mai Abu Moghli: "Research Ethics: Towards Emancipation and Problematising Power Hierarchies".

-Nadine Moawad: "Automating Ethics: Knowledge production under surveillance"

-Ali Kassem: "From Micro to Macro Ethics: Some Decolonial Notes"

-Laura Adwan: "Research/ers ethics, relationships and positionality in a fragmented colonial context"

-Hana Sleiman on "Reflections on the Ethics of Archival Practices in the Arab Region".

The audience of the papers would be the large ACSS community as well as the group specifically interested in questions of research ethics. The papers would be published in an ACSS volume as an Occasional Publication, or as separate working papers in the Working Papers series. While they would be uploaded on the ACSS website, they would also be posted on the ACSS ethics platform (see below) for a richer, more targeted and more extensive exposure, commentary, discussion and feedback.

2) Develop the ACSS ethics platform/website

Work is underway on the website which is envisaged to comprise the following sections:

- Ethics resources including, for example, the ACSS Ethics Guidelines (finalized in English and Arabic); ethical protocols for different types of organizations: academic, civil society, advocacy, think tanks, and media – work in progress)

- Bibliography of works on research ethics in French, English, and Arabic (in progress) and other resources on ethics such as the Birzeit portal and the AUB publications.

- Interactive training material including case studies on controversial ethical issues and dilemmas

- Training manual for individuals and institutions that can be used for training on ethics

- Products/publications of ACSS ethics grantees (both individuals and institutions and ACSS commissioned papers (discussed above)

- A blog

- Visual material and content (such as infographics) to engage a wider audience

IDRC funds are enabling the ACSS to prepare the above material for posting. This includes translation and editing as well as providing the required plug-ins as needed for the website.

Finally, the ACSS has commissioned an overall evaluation of the IDRC funded project on research ethics that will focus on the project activities within a broader examination of the ACSS entire ethics initiative. The evaluation would gauge the ACSS achievements in the area of ethics and areas of potential improvements and will provide as well recommendations for the future.

6. Gender Equality and Inclusion

On all levels of governance - General Assembly, Board of Directors and staff, the ACSS is keen on safeguarding the values of gender diversity, equity and inclusion. Thirty two percent of the ACSS General Assembly are women. Women also make up 53 percent of grantees and fellows and 46 of participants in the latest ACSS conference. The current BoT has 12 members, eight of whom are women and four are men. Also, the Chair of the Board and the Secretary are women. Board members represent different countries: Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan and Palestine and academic disciplines. The ACSS Director General, Dr. Seteney Shami, is a woman from Jordan.

As we choose members of selection committees for all our programs, we take into account geographical, disciplinary, generational and gender composition. The overall gender composition among members of the ethics selection committees was also balanced.

It is important to mention, however, that the vast majority of our programs are based on open calls that are disseminated in the Arab region and the ACSS has no say in the gender of applicants. Also, importantly – for the ACSS, quality of proposals and projects is the primary and decisive factor as proposals are submitted to the selection committee for review and funding decisions.

Below are some relevant gender statistics on applicants and grantees.

Applicants			
	Females	Males	total
cycle 1	15	25	40
cycle 2	4	14	18
cycle 3	6	10	16
Total	25	49	74
%	34%	66%	100%

Grantees			
	Females	Males	Total
cycle 1	4	0	4
cycle 2	0	1	1

cycle 3	5	3	8
Total	9	4	13
%	**69%**	**31%**	**100%**

7. Project Outputs and Dissemination

Research/reflection pieces

Faouzia Borj:

Title: "The Ethical Challenges of Ethnographic Fieldwork in Conflict Settings"

Maouloud Amghar: Working paper (under ACSS review)

Title: "Ethical and methodological contemplations: Social responsibility of researchers in situations of conflict over natural resources – the case of Amidar".

Capacity

-Training on research ethics of more than a hundred recipients of different ACSS grants and fellowships

- Training on research ethics of 60 NewGen fellows in the BA, MA and PhD levels.

-Training of five recipients of individual ethics grants (Ethical Dilemmas - cycles 1 and 2)

-Training of 22 participants representing 18 Palestinian and Jordanian institutions, who participated in the workshop on Ethics of Social Research: Institutional Protocols and Practices (cycle 3-institutional grants).

Pedagogical material/institutional policies, rules and practices

Insaniyyat: Society of Palestinian Anthropologists, Palestine (Laura Adwan)

Outputs:

-Ethical Guidelines for Ethnographic Research

-Wide-scale dissemination of guidelines among sister organizations in Palestine and their global network of anthropologists working on the topic of Palestine

An-Najah University, Palestine (Samah Saleh)

Outputs:

-Course on research ethics and methods in the College of Humanities, Social and Educational Sciences.

-Work on developing protocols for research ethics based on workshops with An Najah University teaching staff and administrators

Jordan University for Science and Technology, Jordan (Omar Khabour)

Outputs:

- Producing a training module on the ethics of open-access publishing and predatory publishers/journals

- Organizing three workshops in Jordanian universities and posting the training modules online.

Al-Quds University's Faculty of Law, Palestine (Munir Nusseibah)

Outputs

-Discussing the Faculty of Law's ethics research framework in an extensive two-day meeting with senior and junior teaching staff and administrators

-Translating the framework from English to Arabic and committing the faculty to uphold ethical standards of research and to put in place a system to ensure implementation and sustainability over the long run.

The Royal Scientific Society of Jordan, Jordan (Yara Shaban)

Outputs:

-A comprehensive needs-based and situational analysis study on the application of research ethics at the Royal Scientific Society

-Reaching an agreement with the Princess Sumaya University for Technology (PSUT) to refer cases that require ethical examination to their already established IRB board.

Jerusalem Center for Women, Palestine (Luna Orikat)

Outputs:

Drafting research ethics protocols for ethical research with women in Palestine based on interviews with women's organizations and researchers. These would eventually become full-fledged ethical guidelines for research on women.

Some reflections on activities:

-An important remark is the generally limited capacities of Arab region researchers and institutions in the area of ethics. This also means that there has been a dearth of experts that the ACSS could turn to for assistance in ethics training and mentorship. While much work is still needed in this area, the ACSS has been able to identify from among its network, some scholars with interest in research ethics who could serve as members of selection committees, trainers and mentors.

-The research ethics training activities exceeded our expectations during the entire grant period and there is clearly huge interest on the part of individuals and institutions. At the same time, the ACSS is institutionalizing research ethics in all its programs and requiring reflections on ethics in all fellowship and grants applications.

-On the level of collaborations and convenings with AUB and Birzeit, while the collaboration process was slow in the first year due to Covid, it improved noticeably in the remaining three years and there was a good degree of communication between the three institutions.

-Finally, on the level of grants on ethics, the ACSS has experimented with both individual and institutional grants and each modality came with its own rewards and challenges. However, all things considered, working on the institutional level seems to travel a long way and have more significant ripple effects on a variety of actors within institutions.

- We expect that the evaluation will cast valuable light on the lessons learnt and outcomes of the project

8. Project Outcomes

Change in behavior and capacities:

-Introducing research ethics: Credit goes to this ethics project and the broader ACSS ethics initiative in introducing a large base of researchers and scholars to this key area of training and knowledge, often for the first time. While this is an important achievement, much work is still needed on the medium and long run to ensure that the ethics culture is indeed spreading in Arab institutions.

-Familiarizing researchers with their institutions: Particularly with the institutional grants, the latter helped open a door that researchers were not necessarily aware of for example, the position of the administrators towards research ethics in social research, the availability of practices and procedures, whether or not ethics were part of the curricula etc.

Identifying priorities and designing work-plans: Although the ACSS grants to individuals and institutions were modest in terms of amount, we were clear that these small funds were a contribution to a first step on a long journey. As the grantees gradually navigated their institutional complexities and bureaucracies and understood how change can happen, they learned to prioritize their work and - if needed - change plans to collect the low hanging fruits and accomplish what seemed to be more practical and doable.

Breaking silos: Workshops organized by the ACSS for grantees from different institutions, were opportunities to meet and exchange views. One cannot over-estimate how invaluable these events

were particularly for Palestinian institutions which because of Israeli restrictions on mobility and travel, feel isolated and marginalized.

Correcting misconceptions: The work done by the ACSS, particularly on the institutional level, corrected some important misconceptions. Examples include the misconception that research ethics are important only for academic institutions. Inviting a wide range of institutions that have in common their interest in social research demonstrated that ethics are essential for all organizations that do research in contact with human subjects. Another misconception had to do with ethics being confined to fieldwork practices. The ACSS approach stipulates that ethics are an all-encompassing process that starts with research design and ends with dissemination of findings.

9. Overall Assessments and Recommendations:

-As the ACSS continues to work in this domain of ethics, its own learning about the scope and limits of ethics grows and develops. Ethics are intrinsic to all our work; there are already existing links to current programs as well as potentials to extend to other areas in the future. It is important for the ACSS to continue to simultaneously build capacities in ethics, narrowly defined (including for example procedures, ethical review boards, consent forms, principles) while nurturing potential areas of intersections with other programs that will ultimately enrich social science research and training.

-The modalities the ACSS experimented with seemed to work well for achieving the overall objective of contributing to the spread of the culture of research ethics in the region as described above. In this context, the ACSS has experimented with important pieces of the ethics puzzle: training, research and networking and collaborations and has uncovered the strengths and weaknesses of the different components.

- If the ACSS were to repeat the experience, with more substantial funding, we would focus on the institutional level and cast the net wider to include more countries and/or sub-regions as well as different types of institutions such as academic, civil society, advocacy, and media institutions. It is now clear to us that each type of institution has different work modalities, and faces different sets of opportunities and challenges. We would also make the case for longer grant durations so we have the chance to complete their projects to full fruition: plan the different stages so they can make a difference in their institutions.

-The question of impact is central to this discussion. What is the impact that the ACSS can make in this area given the low bar of capacities and knowledge alluded to above? one question for the ACSS to continue to consider is the level of intervention that would be most useful: practical and pedagogical or rigorous, reflexive and epistemological or some combination of both.

-The ACSS is increasingly recognized as the authority on research ethics and the go-to-resource for training and knowledge in this area. The ACSS has included ethics in its 2030 strategy and has plans to expand and deepen this work (e.g. by providing an interactive digital platform rich with resources for these purposes, pursuing the interest in ethics of the Arab University Network). There are also continuous demands on the ACSS from Arab institutions to provide training on ethics. That said, the current capacity of the ACSS to respond to the increasing needs is rather limited. In order for it to meet the rising expectations, the ACSS has to develop its own in-house expertise and establish

the necessary regional infrastructure (e.g. regional research ethics committee) to enable it to give this emerging area the full attention it deserves on the medium and long run.

Digital File Formats Supported by the IDRC Digital Library

Item Type	File extension
PDF	Faten Mbarak - Paper.pdf
PDF	Book_of_Proceedings_esdDubrovnik2021_Online. Pdf
Link	https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14767724.2023.2165479?scroll=top&needAccess=true
Website	https://insaniyyatar.squarespace.com/new-page
Website	https://www.insaniyyat.org/references-1
Website	https://open.just.edu.jo/course/index.php?categoryid=9