Ethical Governance of Global Health Security in an Age of Polycrisis

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Issue and Objective

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed critical gaps in the effort to improve global health security and highlighted the need for ethical frameworks to guide preparedness and response efforts. This study examines the ethical challenges in governing global health security amidst intersecting crises. The objective is to identify and analyze key ethical dilemmas and propose principles for equitable, accountable, and effective health security governance.

Methodology and Approach

We conducted a scoping review of academic and policy literature on global health security ethics published between 2010-2023. The review sought to identify key trends in the evolution of health security ethics and analyze changes in response to emergence of increasingly challenging crises.

Results

Critical governance gaps were related to lack of global solidarity, reactivity, and lack of inclusive decision-making in global health institutions. The analysis highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding differential impacts and vulnerabilities.

References

When using this toolkit, decision-makers should:

- Identify the specific issue or decision at hand.
- Consider each ethical principle in relation to the issue.
- Analyze the key dilemmas and considerations for each principle.
- Weigh the competing values and potential consequences.
- Document the reasoning behind the final decision.

Global Health Security Ethics Decision Matrix				
Ethical Principle	Description	Key Dilemmas	Considerations	Intersectional Lens
Equity and Fairness	Ensuring just distribution of benefits and burdens across populations	Resource allocation, access to healthcare	 Fair distribution of resources Addressing health disparities Prioritization strategies 	 Analyze how resource allocation affects marginalized groups Consider compounded disadvantages (e.g., lowincome racial minorities) Ensure equitable access across intersecting identities
Autonomy and Privacy	Respecting individual rights to make informed decisions about their health	Public health measures vs. personal freedom	 Informed consent Data privacy Balancing individual choice with collective good 	 Assess power imbalances in decision-making processes Consider cultural and linguistic barriers to informed consent Evaluate privacy concerns for vulnerable populations
Beneficence and Non-Maleficence	Promoting well-being and preventing harm	Risk-benefit analysis of interventions	 Weighing potential benefits against risks Minimizing unintended consequences Long-term impact assessment 	 Examine differential impacts on diverse groups Consider historical mistrust in healthcare systems Evaluate long-term consequences for intersectional communities
Proportionality and Necessity	Ensuring responses are proportional to the threat and necessary for achieving goals	Justification of restrictive measures	 Least restrictive alternatives Time-limited interventions Evidence-based decision-making 	 Assess disproportionate effects on marginalized groups Consider varying capacities to comply with measures Evaluate necessity through diverse cultural perspectives
Transparency and Accountability	Providing clear information and being answerable for decisions	Balancing security concerns with public disclosure	 Open communication Stakeholder/rightsholder engagement Mechanisms for oversight and redress 	 Ensure inclusive communication strategies Engage diverse stakeholders in accountability processes Address power imbalances in information access
Global Solidarity	Fostering cooperation and mutual support across nations	National interests vs. global needs	 Equitable vaccine distribution Knowledge sharing Collaborative research efforts 	 Consider global power dynamics in resource allocation Address disparities between Global North and South Ensure diverse representation in global decision-making
Individual vs Collective Rights	Balancing personal freedoms with community protection	Public health mandates vs. civil liberties	 Justification for restrictions Compensation for individual sacrifices Protecting vulnerable populations 	 Analyze how restrictions affect different intersectional groups Consider varying definitions of community across cultures Assess power dynamics in defining "collective good"
Proactive vs Reactive	Choosing between preventive measures and responsive actions	Resource allocation for preparedness vs. immediate needs	 Investment in surveillance systems Stockpiling essential supplies Building surge capacity 	 Evaluate preparedness measures for diverse populations Consider historical patterns of neglect in proactive planning Ensure reactive measures address intersectional needs

It's important to note that these principles often intersect and may sometimes conflict with each other. The goal is not to find a perfect solution, but to make well-reasoned decisions that balance various ethical considerations. Additionally, what might be an appropriate decision in one situation may not be in another, depending on factors such as the severity of the threat, available resources, and cultural norms. Lastly, it's crucial to involve diverse stakeholders/rightsholders in the decision-making process and to maintain flexibility as new information becomes available. Ethical decision-making in global health security is an ongoing process that requires continuous evaluation and adjustment.





Discussion

We propose an ethical framework for global health security governance that includes mechanisms for improved coordination and international cooperation, proactive decision making, and balancing competing ethical imperatives. Recommendations focus on reforming global health institutions to enhance transparency and representation, strengthening national capacities for ethical analysis and decision-making, and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration to address health security as part of broader crisis preparedness efforts. Further research is needed on operationalizing ethical principles in diverse contexts and evaluating the long-term impacts of health security measures on vulnerable populations.