

Session 6.2 Improving REC Performance

Enhancing Ethical Oversight: The Role of Lay Members in Research Ethics Committees in Thailand

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Speaker's profile



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Introduction



- This study delves into the evolving role of lay members in Research Ethics Committees (RECs) in Thailand. As research becomes increasingly complex and interdisciplinary, the need for robust ethical oversight is paramount.
- Lay members, with their diverse perspectives and experiences, play a crucial role in ensuring the ethical conduct of research.
- This study documents the findings of a survey of lay members of Research Ethics Committees (REC). The survey was carried out between August and October 2024.

Aim / Approach / Methods



Aims: to find out about the range of contributions that lay members are able to provide on RECs, the backgrounds, contributions, and perspectives. This study sought to find out more about the recommendations and challenges in supporting the reviewing process.

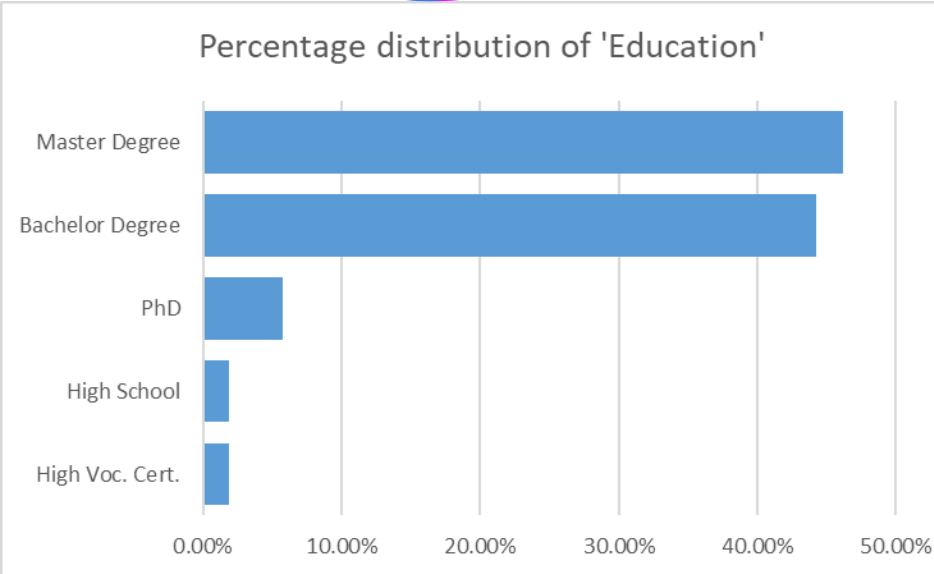
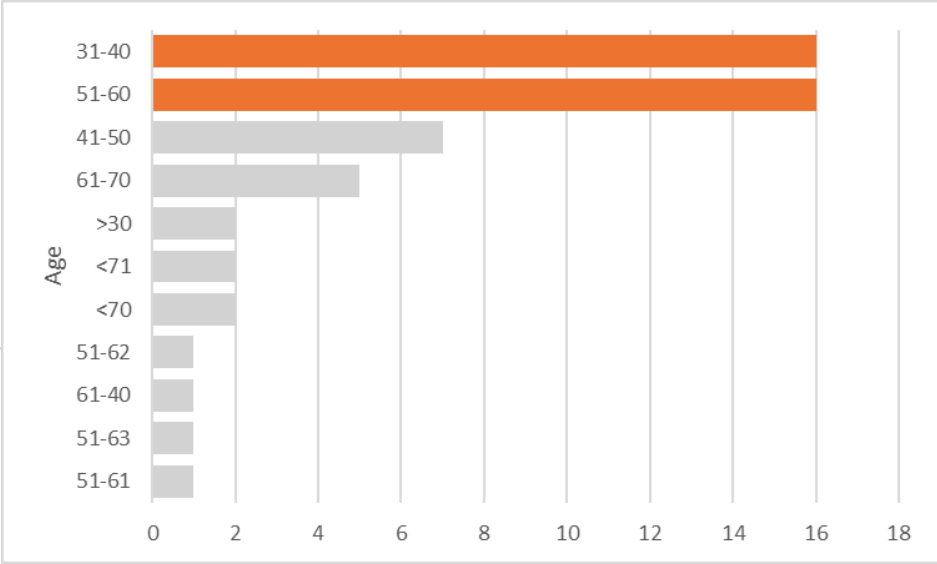
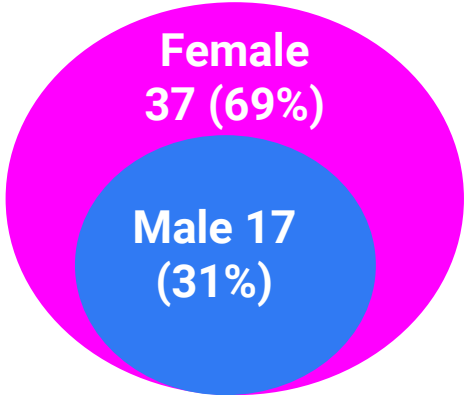
Approach: The exact number of lay members of RECs across Thailand is unknown, however, this report was entirely anonymous with responses neither linked to an individual or REC. Some parts of questions has adapted by the Survey of Lay Members of Research Ethics Committees (RECs) (Simons, Wren, Buckland, 2009)

Method: Online questionnaire, with a combinations of closed and open questions. Descriptive statistic and content analysis were employed

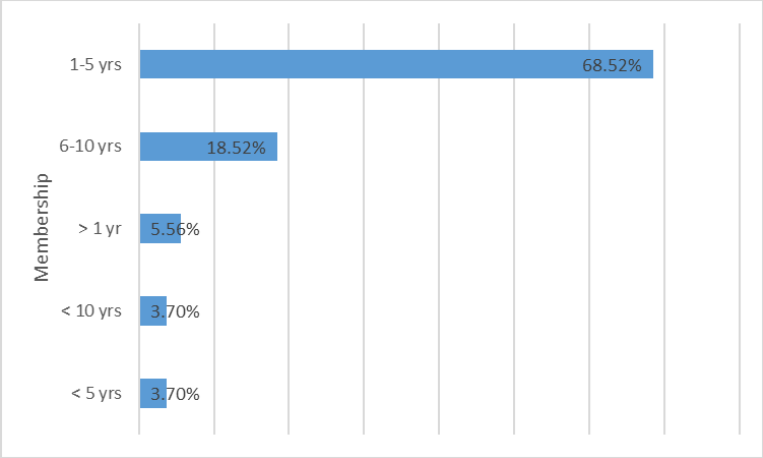
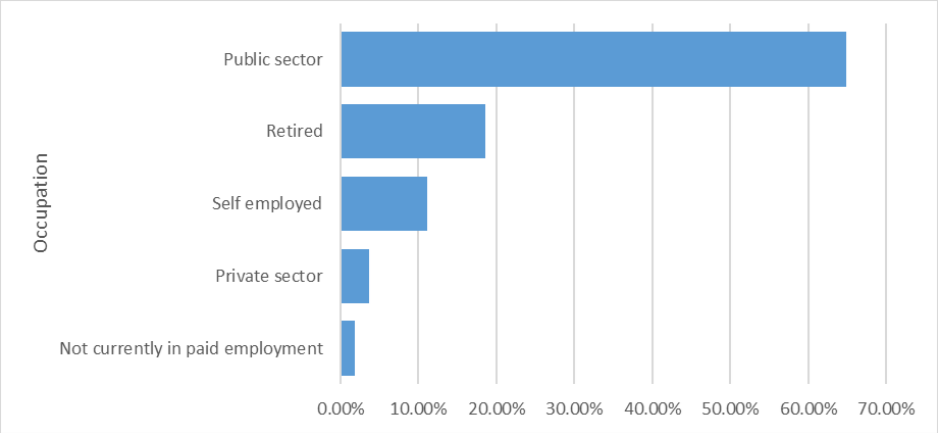
Results

1. Backgrounds and Experiences
2. Contribution experiences as a lay member
3. Recommendations

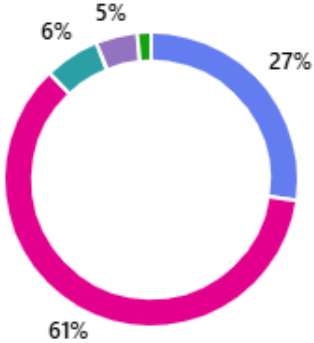
Demographics of REC lay members (n=54)



Demographics of REC lay members (n=54)



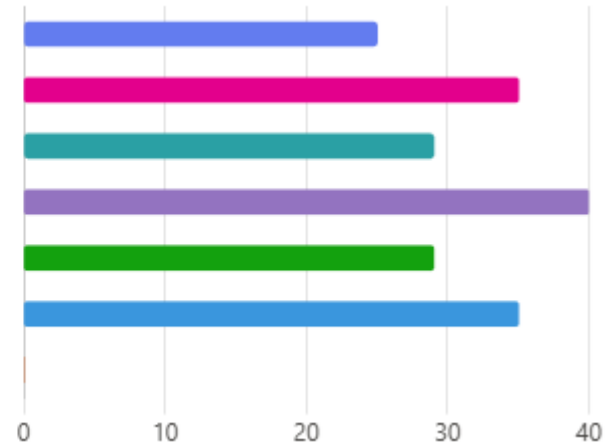
- Someone recommended it 18
- EC/IRB approach 40
- Apply in person 4
- Friend invite 3
- Other 1



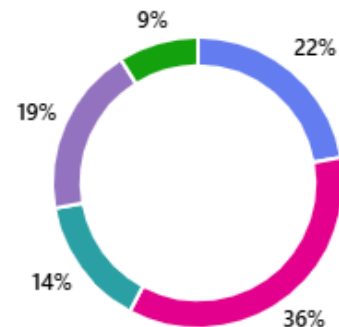
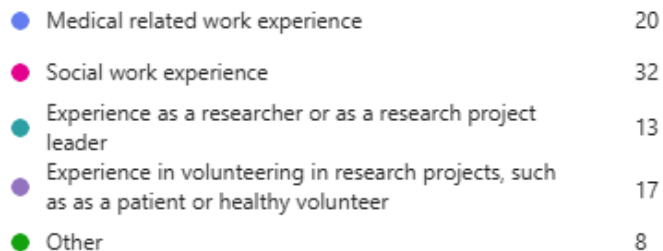


Reasons to join EC/IRB

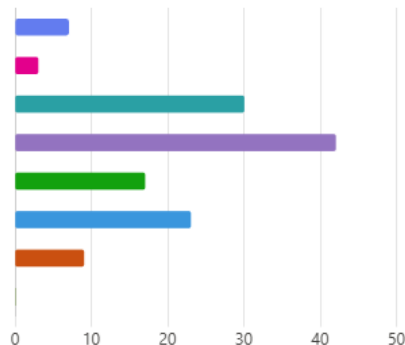
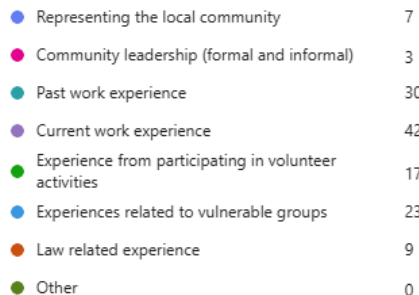
● Interested in human research ethics	25
● I would like to use your experience as part of the feedback process for human research...	35
● Want to create benefits for society	29
● Recognizing the importance of protecting volunteers	40
● Want to learn about human research ethics?	29
● See the importance of self-development from participating as a citizen committee...	35
● Other	0



The experiences that supports EC/IRB

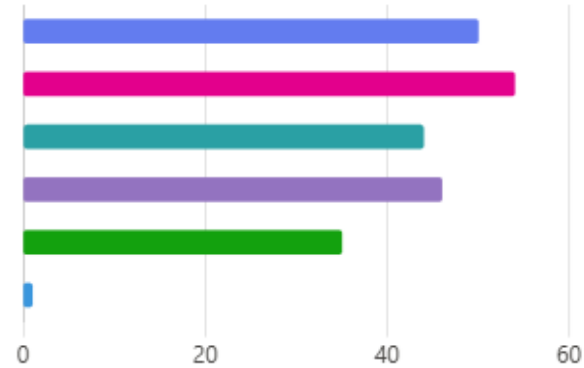


Additional experiences to incorporate into EC/IRB work



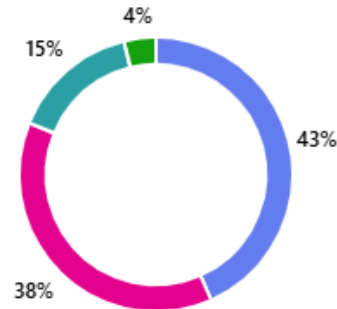
The perspectives that applied to EC/IRB work

Volunteer Protection	50
Considering the risks and benefits of participating in research projects	54
Consideration of projects related to vulnerable groups	44
Consideration of privacy violation issues	46
Selection of research volunteers	35
Other	1



Opinions / perspectives are fully utilized in reviewing process

Every time	23
Often	20
sometimes	8
Never.	0
unsure	2



Opinions about working environment at EC/IRB

● very good ● good ● unsure ● Not very good ● It is an obstacle.

Access to venue (EC/IRB office)

Communication during joint meetings with the EC/IRB committees
(language level, etc.)

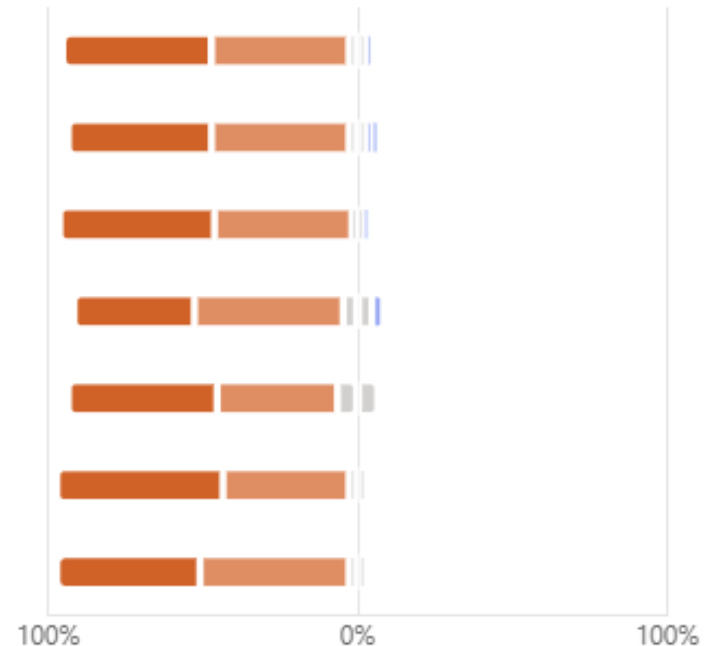
Introduction to the role of layperson (during work or meetings)

Meeting scheduling

Receiving adequate training and skills development for the job.

Quality of meeting management

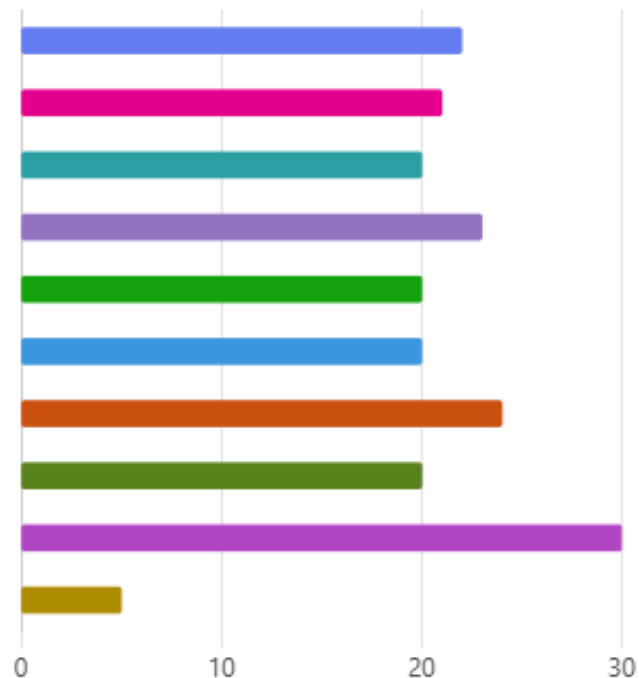
Group dynamics (committee participation)



Challenges in performing EC/IRB work



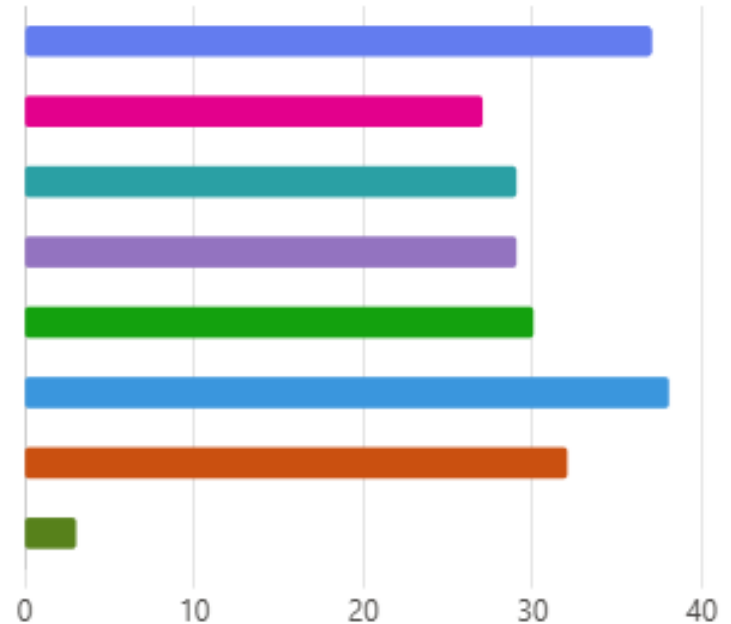
● Consideration of the consent process	22
● Risk assessment of research projects	21
● Considering the benefits of research projects	20
● Considerations for vulnerable groups	23
● Consideration of the risk level of research projects	20
● Issues of privacy violation	20
● Ethical principles regarding volunteer selection	24
● Use of technology in operations	20
● Complex review process	30
● Other	5



Requirements on skill enhancement activities



● Up-to-date ethical review	37
● Assessment of consent request	27
● Use of technology in operations	29
● Privacy Protection Principles	29
● Consideration of the risk level of research projects	30
● Case study on ethical considerations in human research	38
● Consideration of research projects in vulnerable groups	32
● Other	3



Recommendations (1)

1. Need for Continuous Training and Development

“Regular training (annual or more frequent) is emphasized for staying updated on societal and technological changes”

“Training should include a variety of case studies, complex situations, and new knowledge”

Recommendations (2)

2. Improvement in Selection and Qualification Criteria

“Concerns about inappropriate selection of laypersons for ethics committees, such as favoring academic retirees rather than individuals aligned with international standards”

3.Lay members’ Role in Ethics Committees

“Layperson should understand their duties, including considering potential risks in complex research, and work closely with expert committees”

Recommendations (3)

4. Enhancing Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

“ Platforms such as LINE groups, workshops, or regular meetings to exchange ideas and experiences are highly valued”

“Networking and knowledge-sharing sessions, both domestically and internationally, can foster better decision-making”

5. Focus on Informed Consent Processes

“More attention is needed on the process of obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy, freedom, and understanding for volunteers”

Conclusion

- Lay members play an indispensable role in ensuring ethical research.
- Continuous support, innovative practices, and training will strengthen the role of lay members in Thai RECs.
- Final message: Enhancing lay members' effectiveness helps maintain the integrity of scientific research and the protection of participants.

Acknowledgement



I extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Juntra Karbwang Laothavorn for initiating this important survey and offering valuable recommendations. My sincere thanks also go to Khun Marisa from the Health Systems Research Institute (HSRI) for her assistance in distributing the questionnaire. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to all the lay members who participated in the survey, whose contributions have been invaluable to this study.