



Harm-benefit analysis of animal experimentation: a qualitative study of ethics committee practice in six European countries

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Harm-benefit analysis is now a required key element of the procedure for evaluating animal experimentation in the legal framework in Europe and elsewhere. We have previously discussed key challenges to including a harm-benefit analysis in the evaluation of animal research [1]. Thus we have argued that there is lack of clarity and potential disagreement over what to include in the benefit analysis (focusing more narrowly on knowledge gain or including societal contribution) and over how to value different research purposes. It is also unclear to what extent harms are actually weighed against benefits in the actual decision-making. In order to understand how these challenges are dealt with in practice, we have conducted semi-structured interviews with members of Animal Ethics Committees across Europe. After mapping the ethics review systems of the European countries, six case countries were selected for the interviews: Estonia, Holland, Ireland, Portugal, Sweden and Switzerland. Four interviews were conducted in each of these countries. The profile of the chosen interviewees took into account age, gender and expertise and all interviewees had at least one year of committee experience. Interviewees were presented with four hypothetical cases of animal experiments in which factors influencing harm (severity/invasiveness of animal procedures), benefit (purpose, expected outcome) and other aspects of ethical assessment (animal species) were varied. Interviewees were asked to elaborate on how harm and benefit would be assessed, as well as on the final decision-making. Both interviewees' own assessment and their view of how their committee as a whole would handle the same case were addressed. The results, which are presently being analysed, will provide insight into how the main decisionmakers over animal experiments assess and weigh harms and benefits in the context of ethical deliberation.

- 1 N Olsson, I. A. S., Castro, A. C. V., Varga, O. E. and Sandøe, P. (2014). Harm-benefit analysis of animal experimentation: Lack of conceptual clarity and underlying moral disagreement. Oral presentation. 9th World Congress on Alternatives and Animals in the Life Sciences. Prague, Czech Republic 24-28 August 2014.