On the relative importance of training in research ethics

- Insights from a Norwegian study

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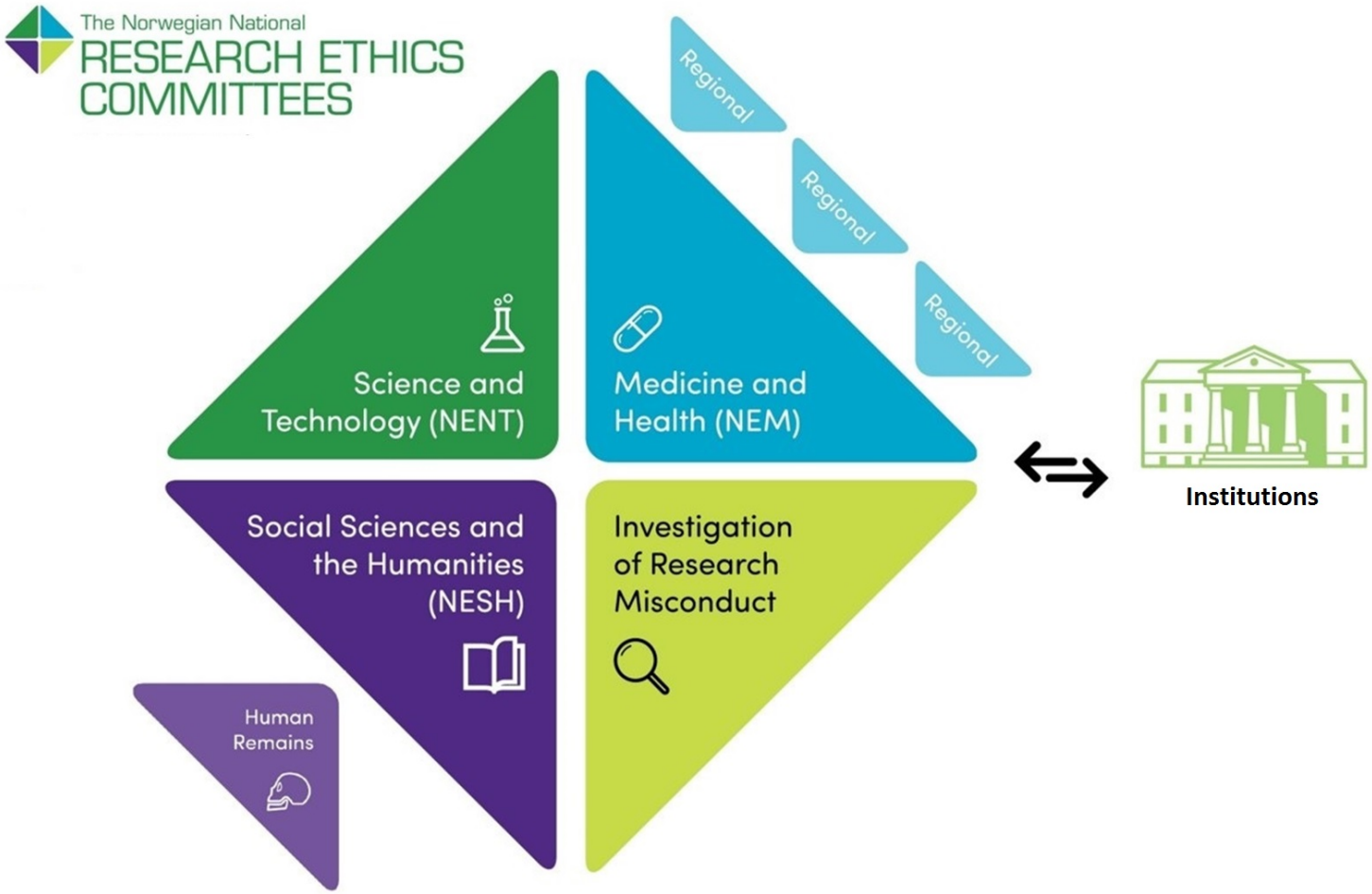
The Norwegian System for Research Ethics



The Research Ethics Act (2017) § 5:

Research institutions are responsible for:

a) necessary training of candidates and employees in recognised norms of research ethics, and

b) ensuring that everyone who conducts or participates in the research is familiar with recognised norms of research ethics.

The RINO-project

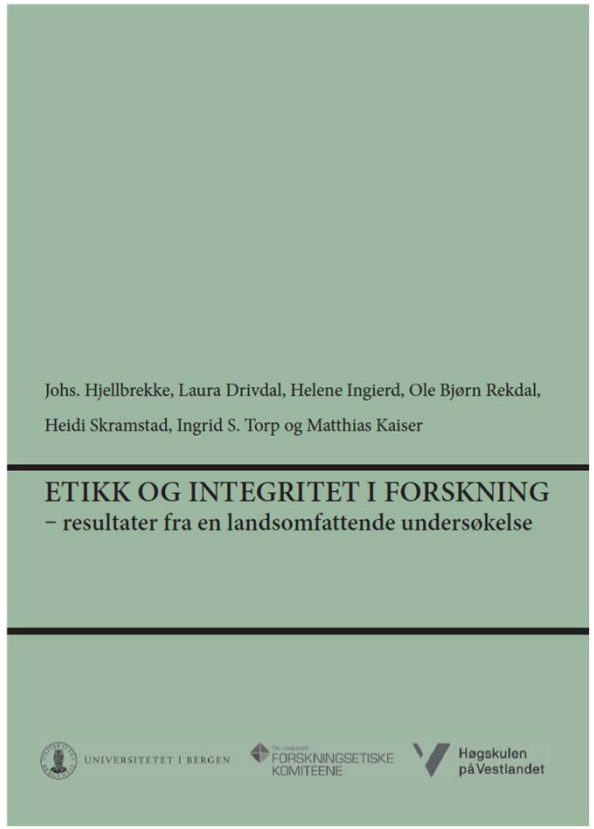
- **Quantitative part**:

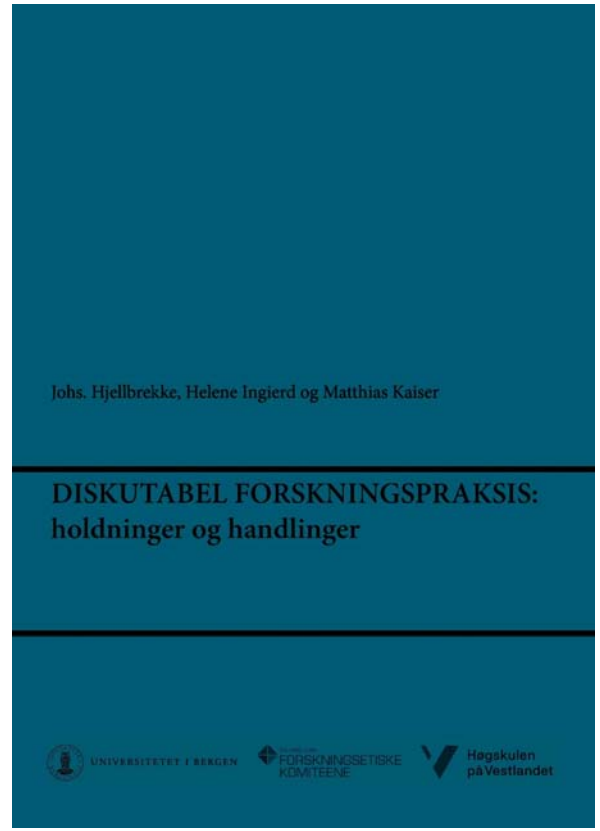
Survey sent to scientists in Norway (31 206). 7 291 replied.

36,8% had not attended any course.

- **Qualitative part:**

3 focus group interviews + 12 individual interviews





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Concepts and focus of the study

Concepts in research ethics training literature

- Formal vs informal
- Principle-based vs virtue-based

Focus of our analysis:

1) Formal training and knowledge of research ethical guidelines

2) How knowledge of principles / norms for ‘good scientific practice’ is generated: formally and informally

3) The relevance of formal and informal training

(1) Formal training and knowledge of guidelines(survey)

	Have you participated in any course on research ethics?				
Are you familiar with research ethical guidelines (Norwegian or international) within your field of expertise?	No, never	Yes, a course lasting one day or less	Yes, a course lasting more than one day	Yes, several courses (either short or long)	Total
I have no knowledge of this.	6,8	1,4	0,9	0,9	3,2
I have some knowledge of this.	61,6	50,3	45,7	14,1	47,5
I am well informed on this matter .	31,6	48,3	53,4	85,0	49,3
Total	100 (n=2674)	100 (n=1711)	100 (n=1692)	100 (n=1176)	100 (n=7253)

(2) Learning principles / norms for 'good scientific practice': **formal** and **informal** training

1) Formal training

Junior researchers highlighted research ethics courses

2) Informal training a): Role models - colleagues and supervisors:

"In my generation, you learned it through supervisors and colleagues. It is a culture you enter into and then you learn that culture» (social scientists at old university)

"It was through colleagues and collaborators that I learned who has actually done enough, and what it requires to be a co-author of a scientific work" (natural scientist at research institute)

3) Informal training b): Learning by doing

"I did research on an authoritarian regime, so I became more aware of that this [research ethical regulations] was not just a ritual dance in front of a committee, but it was actually a matter of people's safety" (social scientist at young university)

(3) The relevance of **formal training**

How courses should be organized

1) When? Also *after* gaining research experience
2) Mandatory or voluntary? Mandatory but integrated in other activities
3) By whom? Engage researchers rather than delegating to administrative staff

What courses should contain

1) Reflections of why research ethics matter – quality in science and trust society
2) General vs field-specific courses
3) Principles **and** discussions of experiences and cases

   "…when I was presented to research ethical principles, I thought, this is of course very important, but then you don't really manage to reflect upon the principles until you are in a situation where you see that it is actually difficult … But we did get good training through different cases. ***That was very educational, even if the cases are very different from the situations you meet yourself… it was the thought-process of how to solve ethical dilemmas that was useful to learn****" (mathematician at young university)*

(3) The relevance of **informal training**

1) Positive role models

«And my supervisor, he didn't have any focus on research ethics explicitly, but he was a living example, so to speak, of ethical behavior…» (senior economist at young university)

2) Open work environment

«Perhaps it is more important that there is culture for research ethics, than a course, where one is formed and there is room for formation and where you learn to think in a certain way…» (mathematician at young university)

Conclusions/recommendations

- Formal and informal training may be mutually reinforcing
- Good formal training should include both principle-based and virtue-based approaches
- Good informal training requires an open work environment and positive role models

Organisation of RINO

Working group

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- **Vidar Enebakk** (Director, The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and the Humanities)
- **Anne Marit Blokhus** (Professor, Department of Chemistry, UoB)
- **Kristin Hinna** (The Norwegian Association of Researchers and HVL)
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- **Svein Nordenson** (Retired. Former SINTEF, The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee for Science and Technology, The Association of Norwegian Research Institutes (FFA))

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