

# Ethics of Risk-Stratified Tuberculosis Screening

Matthew Saunders\*

Department of Infectious Diseases and Immunity, Imperial College London, London, UK

## DESCRIPTION

The ethics of risk-stratified Tuberculosis (TB) screening is a complex and multifaceted issue. On one hand, risk-stratified screening can be seen as a more efficient allocation of resources and a means to prioritize individuals who are at the highest risk of developing TB. On the other hand, it raises ethical questions about fairness, stigmatization, and access to healthcare.

### The ethical basis for risk-stratified TB screening

Risk-stratified TB screening is grounded in the ethical principle of beneficence, which requires that we act in ways that promote the well-being of individuals and communities. It is a practical approach to allocate limited healthcare resources efficiently and effectively, as it focuses on identifying and providing care to those at the greatest risk of TB. By concentrating resources where they are most needed, risk-stratified screening can improve early detection and intervention, ultimately reducing the spread of TB.

**Fairness and equity:** Risk-stratified screening, in principle, may seem more efficient, but it can also be viewed as inequitable. By prioritizing high-risk groups, there's a risk of neglecting individuals who may not fit these high-risk profiles but are still susceptible to TB. This approach can unintentionally exclude vulnerable populations and perpetuate health disparities, which runs counter to the principles of justice and equity.

**Stigmatization and discrimination:** An ethical concern with risk-stratified TB screening is the potential for stigmatization and discrimination. High-risk groups, often marginalized or vulnerable populations, may experience further stigma, exclusion, and discrimination when singled out for screening. This could discourage individuals from seeking care, deter them from being tested, and ultimately hinder TB control efforts.

**Missed cases:** Risk-stratified screening may result in missed cases of TB, as it primarily focuses on high-risk groups. This can lead to delayed diagnoses, treatment delays, and increased transmission of the disease in the broader community. Ethically, this raises questions about the duty of healthcare systems to provide equal care to all individuals.

### Balancing ethical concerns

Striking a balance between the practicality of risk-stratified TB screening and the ethical concerns it raises is essential for effective TB control. Here are some key considerations for finding this balance:

**Inclusivity:** While risk-stratified screening can be a valuable tool, it should not replace universal screening strategies entirely. Inclusive approaches ensure that individuals not fitting high-risk profiles have access to TB screening and healthcare services. This is particularly important in regions where TB is more widespread or among populations not adequately covered by risk stratification.

**Education and sensitization:** To address stigmatization and discrimination, educational and sensitization programs should be implemented. These programs can help reduce the negative perceptions and social barriers associated with TB, making it more acceptable for individuals to seek screening and treatment.

**Access to care:** To mitigate the ethical concerns about missed cases, healthcare systems should ensure that individuals who develop TB symptoms have access to diagnostic testing and treatment. Timely and accessible healthcare services are a fundamental ethical obligation.

**Regular review and adjustment:** Risk-stratified screening criteria should be subject to regular review and adjustment. As TB dynamics change, and more data become available, it is essential to reassess the criteria to ensure that they remain equitable, effective, and aligned with ethical principles.

**Data privacy and consent:** It is crucial to respect individuals' privacy and obtain informed consent for screening, particularly in high-risk populations. This safeguards individuals' autonomy and dignity while adhering to ethical principles.

## CONCLUSION

Risk-stratified TB screening is a complex issue that necessitates a nuanced approach. While it offers the potential to more efficiently allocate resources and focus on high-risk groups, it also raises ethical concerns related to fairness, stigmatization,

**Correspondence to:** Matthew Saunders, Department of Infectious Diseases and Immunity, Imperial College London, London, UK, E-mail: matthew.saunders33@ifhad.org

**Received:** 28-Sep-2023, Manuscript No. LDAME-23-27858; **Editor assigned:** 02-Oct-2023, PreQC No. LDAME-23-27858 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 16-Oct-2023, QC No. LDAME-23-27858; **Revised:** 23-Oct-2023, Manuscript No. LDAME-23-27858 (R); **Published:** 30-Oct-2023, DOI: 10.35248/2385-5495.23.09.67

**Citation:** Saunders M (2023) Ethics of Risk-Stratified Tuberculosis Screening. *Adv Med Ethics*. 09:67.

**Copyright:** © 2023 Saunders M. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

and access to healthcare. Regular review of screening criteria and respecting individuals' privacy and consent are also vital. In our pursuit of effective TB control, we must not lose sight of the ethical principles that underpin healthcare, ensuring that every

individual has the right to access care and protection from TB without discrimination or stigma. Ultimately, it is through this balanced approach that we can make meaningful progress in tackling the global burden of tuberculosis.