



CHILD TRENDS / CHILD TRENDS 5 / FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INTEGRATING RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY IN RESEARCH

Child Trends 5

Five guiding principles for integrating racial and ethnic equity in research



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AUTHORS:
JENITA PAREKH,
KRISTINE ANDREWS,
SHANTAI PECKOO

Racial disparities that exist today arise from long-established social and legal systems that perpetuate and reinforce racism and inequity. As researchers who make recommendations for policies, programs, and practices, we have a responsibility to accurately reflect the historical and current lived realities of people of color and to avoid further perpetuating disparities, inequities, and stereotypes. To advance the goal of incorporating a racial and ethnic equity perspective in research and evaluation, Child Trends presents five principles to guide our work.

Because every research project is unique, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to incorporating a racial and ethnic equity perspective in research. However, all researchers can apply these principles to their work in ways that improve various fields' understanding of how to use research to create greater equity.

1. Examine our own backgrounds and biases.

Researchers strive to be neutral and objective; nevertheless, they have biases, values, backgrounds, and experiences that may affect the way they conduct research. Bias influences decisions made throughout the research process, including what research questions are asked (and by whom), how data are collected, how findings are interpreted and communicated, and which audiences and methods are selected for dissemination. Researchers should reflect on how their own racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds—and their own experiences (or lack of experiences) with racism and privilege—may pervade the research they undertake. A single decision to address bias, such as having a racial or ethnic match between researcher and the population of study, is not enough to address bias; researchers must pay careful attention to all influences of bias in a study. This principle involves a genuine process of internal reflection.

2. Commit to digging deeper into the data.

Researchers often document differences in outcomes among racial and ethnic groups as a step toward identifying disparities. However, to fully address inequities, researchers must move beyond simply noting disparities, and focus instead on uncovering the context for and systemic causes of these inequities. This focus is especially critical for communities of color because systemic causes have historically been distorted or overlooked to perpetuate racist systems and beliefs. Researchers should dig deeper to examine whether data point to a legacy of racism or systemic inequities that underlie racial and ethnic differences in outcomes, rather than to an intrinsic deficit of the population in question. Doing this requires researchers to frame questions to uncover causes of disparities—and perhaps to apply a tool such as a Racial Equity Impact Analysis—to examine how policies, programs, or practices impact who is affected.

3. Recognize that the research process itself impacts people and communities; researchers play a role in ensuring that their research benefits communities.

Some researchers have conducted studies in ways that exploited and abused communities and people of color. Researchers should strive to understand that when people of color give information, they may feel either honored or exploited in doing so. Unfortunately, it is common practice for researchers to obtain data from or about people without adequately addressing issues that concern them. These practices reinforce a dominant research paradigm that allows researchers to enter a community and study populations for their own interest, adding to the abuse and exploitation that vulnerable communities already face.

To be ethical, research must be reciprocal. This means that people who give researchers consent to use their data should have the issues that concern them addressed, in some capacity. Researchers should work to prevent harm by being transparent with communities from the start and identifying what people want in return for their contribution.

4. Engage communities as partners in research and credit them for their contribution.

Researchers typically conduct research *on* communities, not *with* them—meaning that community members may have little to no involvement in the direction or outcomes of this research. But to incorporate a racial and ethnic equity perspective, researchers must authentically engage community stakeholders. The meaning and value given to data and research findings are influenced by who interprets them. Community stakeholders—people who experience the issue that researchers are interested in—can offer a perspective or interpretation that differs from that of researchers.

Researchers should endeavor to work with communities to accurately and effectively present information; this collaboration could include defining the research issue or topic and brainstorming solutions. Community-engaged research considers a community's culture, relationships, and policies; as such, it is a mechanism for conducting research from a race and ethnic equity perspective. Early community engagement is ideal and should continue throughout the research process; moreover, a true partnership recognizes a community's contribution to the research.

5. Guard against the implied or explicit assumption that white is the normative, standard, or default position.

Researchers typically make comparisons to white outcomes when they examine disparities. Such comparisons reflect the assumption that white outcomes are the standard, and that communities of color should aim to achieve that standard. These comparisons also apply positive values to cultural norms associated with whiteness and negatively measure people of color by those norms. Making comparisons to the outcomes and norms of white people neglects structural factors and root causes that may lead to disparities. A racial and ethnic equity approach moves beyond measuring disparities or closing gaps by shifting the focus to better outcomes for all, while still acknowledging the need for tailored solutions.

This CT-5 is adapted from our working paper, **How to Apply a Racial and Ethnic Equity Perspective in Research: Practical Guidance for the Research Process**. The larger paper presents tools, informed by these five guiding principles, to incorporate a racial and ethnic equity perspective into each stage of the research process.

TOPICS: RACE EQUITY

Authors

Jenita Parekh

Kristine Andrews

Shantai Peckoo