

Ethnicity Issues

Is ethnicity a variable of analysis in your research?

If you intend to use ethnicity as a variable of analysis in your research it is important to be clear in your understanding of ethnicity and what your assumptions are in its measurement.

What is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity is a social construct, not a biological determinant. Individuals may identify with different ethnicities over time and/or with multiple ethnic groups. Ethnicity is not the same as ancestry or “race”.

Do you really mean ethnicity or are you using ethnicity as a proxy?

If your research concerns an area where ethnic health inequities are present, it is important to determine what your hypothesis is in relation to ethnicity. If you hypothesise that the inequity is associated with socio-economic status, then robust measures of socio-economic position are needed. Ethnicity should not be used as a substitute for measures of health determinants such as socio-economic status (e.g. NZ Deprivation Index) or geographic place, as you may then over-control for its effect. For further discussion of these issues, [see Jones, C \(2001\)](#).

Additionally, ethnicity may not itself be relevant to the efficacy of the intervention you are studying, but differential access (by ethnicity) to services or treatment may be an important inequity. For example, a rehabilitation method for brain injury may be assumed to be equally effective across all ethnic groups, but referral or access to such a service may be patterned by ethnicity. On the other hand, if you are carrying out research that hypothesises a genetic cause/contribution to the disease or inequities in the incidence of the disease, ethnicity will not be adequate; you will need to collect genetic information.

How is Ethnicity Measured?

It is important to understand standard methods of collecting ethnicity data.

You will need to consider the accuracy and completeness of ethnicity data collection in your research design and/or in assessing the data sets you use. Please ensure you are familiar with current Ministry of Health ethnicity data protocols. See links below.



[Ministry of Health Ethnicity Data Protocols](#)



Definitions in Official Statistics [Census Questions on Ethnicity and Ancestry] Chapter 2, [Hauora Māori Standards of Health IV](#) (PDF 646, KB)

For other relevant documents see the New Zealand Statistics website:



[NZ Statistics website](#)