
Health & Health Disparity Session: Panel on Measuring Race & Ethnicity

Health Disparity (NIH):

“the differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of disease and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the United States”

<http://healthdisparities.nih.gov/whatare.html>

Health Disparity

Ethnic/racial groups demonstrate disparity in health status:

- Health behaviors & lifestyle patterns
- Access to care
- Quality of services

Measuring Race & Ethnicity

On the other hand,

“Excessive focus on racial or ethnic differences runs the risk of undervaluing the great diversity that exists among persons within (race/ethnic) groups.

This risk needs to be weighed against the fact that in epidemiologic and clinical research, racial and ethnic categories are useful for generating and exploring hypotheses about environmental and genetic risk factors, as well as interaction between risk factors, for important medical outcomes.”

Burchard et al. The importance of race and ethnic background in biomedical research and clinical practice. *NEJM* 2003; 348(12):1170-75.

**To address health
disparities,
it is necessary to
reliably measure race
and ethnicity.**

Race/Ethnicity Reporting Conventions

- **Birth Certificate:** race/ethnicity information reported by the family or by observation
 - If one parent White & the other not, the child assigned the race of the non-White parent, except if any part Hawaiian, the child is assigned to Hawaiian
 - Starting in 1989, the infant assigned race of the mother
- **Death Certificate:** race/ethnicity recorded by funeral director, based on informant information or observation
- **Census:** race/ethnicity reported by individual him/her self or the reporting household member

Historical Terminology on Race & Ethnicity

US Census

- ❑ **1790**, “White, Black & Civilized Indians (i.e. those who paid taxes)”
- ❑ **1800-1900**, “ White, Black and Other Colored (Indian, Chinese, Japanese)”
- ❑ **1870**, Chinese added as a category
- ❑ **1890**, Japanese added as a category
- ❑ **1930**, Mexican added as a category
- ❑ **1930-1970**, “White & Other or Non-White” & sometimes “Black”
- ❑ **1978** (OMB PL 94-311)

Race: “American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian or Pacific ;Black; White” **Ethnicity:** “Hispanic Origin; Not of Hispanic Origin”

Terminology & Reporting OMB 1993, Directive 15

- **Race**

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White

- **Ethnicity**

- Hispanic or Latino
- Not Hispanic or Latino

- **Reporting**

- Self identification
 - Option to select one or more ethnicities
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Data Quality

- Quality, reliability, and accuracy of rates of diseases reported by race/ethnicity vary among population groups
 - White and Black rates found more reliable
 - Asian and Hispanic rates found less reliable

Today's Panel: Examines Aspects of Measuring Race and Ethnicity

- **Rita Carreon:** results of a survey on types of race/ethnicity data collected by US health plans
 - **Debra Ritzwoller:** comparison of self-identified race/ethnicity to use of surname analysis (the GUESS system) & geocoding
 - **Rachel Novotny:** BLEND method to collect and analyze race/ethnicity data among racially/ethnically mixed populations
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