

Preventing Stigmatizing Research

(Adapted from All of Us Responsible Conduct of Research)

Many individuals in America suffer disproportionately high rates of morbidity and mortality as a result of racism and systems of oppression that systematically target racial/ethnic minority groups and individuals from rural, low-income, and other underserved populations. Understanding the roots of these disparities is a critical step towards finding solutions to eliminate them. In doing so, however, researchers must be careful not to further contribute to, or perpetuate stigmatization, marginalization, discrimination or loss of status to a person or group of people. Thus, it is the responsibility of **all** researchers to design their research with attention to these concerns; to analyze and use data wisely, ethically, and with deference to the sensitivities that may exist as a result of historical and current injustices.

Factors that may perpetuate stigma in research:

- A lack of cultural sensitivity, awareness, or competence in study design
 - Including statements or conducting research in a way that disrespects or disregards cultural considerations or labels specific groups of people.
- Insufficient understanding of the limitations of techniques, instruments, or methods
 - This may lead to inaccurate or incomplete interpretations of the research findings.
- Improper scope
 - Failing to include particular variables or use of inappropriately restrictive samples, which can limit the comprehensiveness of research findings or lead to erroneous conclusions.
- Inadequate context
 - Failing to contextualize (e.g., excluding social determinants of health or sociocultural factors) or overgeneralizing findings; thus, allowing others to incorrectly interpret a study's results.
- Overstating the significance of findings
 - By making inaccurate assumptions about study objectives or outcomes, or insufficiently acknowledging the caveats of the study.

Prevent Stigmatization

Many research harms could be prevented if participant communities are engaged in the research process. This will allow their perspectives, experiences, and insights to be considered in the design, interpretation, and presentation of results.

In addition, some steps to prevent stigmatization of individuals or groups as a result of research include, but are not limited to:

- Consider study inclusion criteria carefully and be as expansive as possible. Do not exclude certain groups of people out of convenience or habit.
- Respect the people whose lives form the basis of your research data.
- Understand and appropriately implement your analytical tools.
- Use precise language to describe your findings.
- Consider how your research might be misinterpreted to the detriment of others.
- Consider the full range of factors, positive and negative, that may be related to research results and situate your research in the appropriate context.

Collectively, these practices are critical not only for health disparity research but for all science.