

Suggested Race and Ethnicity Language and Data Interpretation Guide*

*Suggested language is adapted from recommendations from the Women's Health Initiative Race and Ethnicity Task Force, which are based on published material that include: Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) February 2021 editorial; November 2020 American Heart Association (AHA) Structural Racism and Health Equity Language Guide, Call to Action from American Heart Association Presidential Advisory group on structural racism, and a new 2020 standard for publishing on racism.

On February 22, 2021, JAMA published an editorial reporting of race and ethnicity in medical and science journals (AMA Manual of Style subsection on Race/Ethnicity, Section 11.12.3) that acknowledged the indistinct construct of racial and ethnic categories and the important sensitivities and controversies related to the use of these terms in medical and health research, education, and practice.

General Principles Guiding Reference to “Race” and “Ethnicity”

Inclusive Language

- “Inclusive language supports diversity and conveys respect. Language that imparts bias toward or against persons or groups on characteristics or demographics must be avoided” (Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) February 2021 editorial).

Race and ethnicity are non-interchangeable socio-political constructs, which are not rooted in biology.

- **Race** often serves as a proxy for both historical and ongoing disadvantage in social, economic, environmental, and structural factors, arising from racism. A “biological” basis for race has been debunked in the scientific literature.
- **Ethnicity** refers to the social characteristics people may have in common, such as language, religion, regional background, traditions, and culture.

Carefully consider why race or ethnicity variables are being used in the research, i.e., what is represented with “race” or “ethnicity” and how does this use contribute to the scientific question being addressed?

- It is preferable that scientific questions examine associations within select historically marginalized race or ethnic groups. Comparisons of select race or ethnic groups to Non-Hispanic Whites are not encouraged.
- Within group analyses, highlight the heterogeneity and resilience available in racial and ethnic groups.

Define and interpret race within a socio-political framework as a proxy for both historical and ongoing disadvantage arising from racism in social determinants of health, such as education, income, resilience and stressful life events.

- It is important to appreciate that other structural factors may be important for the data interpretation of racially disparate outcomes, such as discrimination, racial capitalism, adverse childhood experiences, and access to wealth.

Guidelines Pertaining to Use of Terms for Racial and Ethnic Groups

The general term “**minorities**” and “**non-white**” should be avoided; instead specify with terms such as racial or ethnic minority groups. Other terms such as “**underserved groups**” or “**underrepresented populations**” may be used. “**Historically marginalized populations or racial and ethnic groups**” can be suitable in certain contexts if the rationale for this designation is provided.

The terms “**multiracial, mixed race, and multiethnic**” are acceptable in reports of studies if the specific categories the terms comprise are defined. If the criteria for data quality and confidentiality are met, at a minimum, the number of individuals identifying with more than one race should be reported.

The nonspecific group label “**other**” should be avoided unless it was a prespecified form category; in such cases, the categories included in “**other**” groups should be defined and reported. Authors are advised to be as specific as possible when reporting on racial and ethnic categories (even if these categories contain small percentages).

As noted above, people should be referred to by their self-identified race and ethnicity. “**People of Color**” and “**brown**” may be used colloquially, i.e., within an opinion article) but these terms should not be used in research reports unless the terms are included in a database on which a study is based or specified in the research collection instrument. Avoid using “**POC**.”

“**Black, Indigenous and other people of color**”: use only if accurate in specific situations; avoid as general term for people of color because Hispanic/Latinx people may not see themselves in this phrase.

“**Vulnerable**” can imply some people need someone to save them; however, this term may be necessary and appropriate in some contexts.