

Ethnicity in Administrative Data: Learnings from Focus Groups with Young Migrants

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Key Finding: Migrants and non-migrants' lived experience of ethnicity is not fully inter-changeable, even if they share the same Census ethnic category.



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Introduction

Administrative data hold great potential for generating evidence for policy to support migrants, but it is difficult to capture and interpret ethnicity in a meaningful way. We aimed to explore how migrant groups understand the representations of ethnicity, and explore alternative ways for researchers to make sense of their data

Interactive Game: Tricky Categories

Here are some ethnicities coded in free-text. Please classify them to the given ethnic categories accordingly. One ethnicity can only be linked to 1 category only.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Aboriginal Australian | ● | ● Asian, Asian British, Asian Welsh |
| White Northern Albanians | ● | ● Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African |
| Japanese-Korean | ● | ● Mixed or Multiple |
| Hispanic | ● | ● White |
| Kurdish | ● | ● Other ethnic group |

Methods

We organised three 1-hour-long guided focus groups with 10 young people from Nigeria, Sudan, Syria, Iran, Kurdistan and Iraq. All materials were shared with 2 young people before finalised. We reflected on:

1) What is ethnicity? How should ethnicity be asked inclusively, and better recorded?

2) Does ethnicity change over time or context? If so, why?

3) How should researchers best understand the relationship between ethnicity and health?

All participants were reimbursed at the rate of £25 per hour for their participation, with transport fees covered and a meal provided before each discussion.

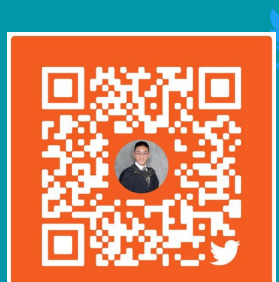
Results & Discussion

Ethnicity is a personal identity and should never be prescribed by others. To minimise misrepresentation, researchers should ask individuals to describe their ethnicity in free-text with a series of probing questions covering different dimensions of ethnicity, such as language, nationality, cultural belongingness.

Ethnicity changes over time and context according to personal experience, social pressure, and nationality change. Traditional (essentialist) methods of handling ethnicity in admin data e.g. treating ethnicity as time-invariant by using the latest or modal response etc. does not converge with migrants' experience of ethnic identity. In administrative data, creating a spine for ethnicity over time and source of information may not be appropriate.

Mixed Ethnicity: The inconsistency of ethnicity in mixed and other groups may be due to the extra administrative burden of proof when they are not White.

Conclusion: Migrants and non-migrants' lived experience of ethnicity is not fully inter-changeable, even if they share the same ethnic category. Young people and migrants' voices need to be amplified in designing how administrative data are collected and analysed.



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