

Gender checklist: Ensure your research is gender sensitive

Introduction

The aim of this checklist is to support researchers in ensuring that their research is gender sensitive, and doesn't inadvertently perpetuate gender or intersectional inequities. From the initial phase of generating research questions to reporting overall conclusions, this checklist seeks to provide research teams, especially those lacking a background in gender studies, with the tools needed to think critically about their approach to research. The purpose of this checklist is to interrogate the assumptions that teams may have when conducting research, as well as identify potential instances in which research endeavors may be enabling inequality. Designed specifically by health researchers, this checklist emphasizes health science; however, many of the questions asked here are also applicable to other fields of study.

This checklist was developed by researchers predominantly representing prominent and elite academic institutions and research NGOs, mostly located in the Global North, a perspective that may limit the universal applicability of the provided questions. Since such institutions are often privileged in their global position, these questions also seek to investigate the power relationships that may inform a project's trajectory and address the power imbalances produced by such conditions. With that in mind, this checklist seeks to inform research conducted by institutions that occupy similar positions of power rather than claiming homogenous applicability.

Ultimately, integrating a gender sensitive framework into research improves not only the results of a research project, but also our understanding of gendered and intersectional impacts across different fields of inquiry.

Definitions

A common misconception about gender sensitive research is that it needs to look specifically at a gendered issue, topic, or question. Contrary to popular opinion, "Gender sensitive research is not research on women or on gender relationships; it is research that takes into account gender as a significant variable."¹ Gender sensitive research is a framework used to embellish the understanding of a particular issue by noting how the cross-sections of identities like gender, race, class, disability status, LGBTQIA2+ identity (the interconnected nature of these characteristics has been termed "intersectionality"²) may influence the results of a particular inquiry. The term gender sensitive is taken from the third of five stages on the WHO scale for Gender Responsiveness.³ It is defined as policy, programs or research that "considers gender norms, roles and relations." The next two levels, gender-specific and gender-transformative, take these considerations further, towards active rebalancing of gender and intersectional inequities.

How to use the checklist

This list has been designed primarily as an identifying tool to challenge fundamental assumptions that may be present in research. When completing the exercise, there may be questions to which your research project answers "no." Many of the questions will offer a new perspective that can easily be incorporated into your research methodology. For example, one question in the proposal stage reads "Has the research team connected with any relevant local organizing groups?" If the answer is no, addressing this shortcoming can be achieved by reaching out to local community groups in order to approach research from a more holistic place with a local, and grassroots focus. However, for other questions it may be more difficult to enact meaningful change to research design. To address these larger challenges, there is a list of resources provided at the end of this checklist designed to support researchers in learning how to utilize a more gender sensitive framework.





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Proposal stage

When generating research questions and preparing for research

What are the gender norms for the region that you are conducting research in? Are there specific norms relating to conduct between different genders that could impact data collection (i.e. between a foreign male researcher and local female interviewee)?



Does your research make space for marginalized identities beyond the male-female binary? Do you include a space for pronoun selection? Are you considering the specific gendered needs of LGBTQIA2+ populations?



Is the approval of a male family member needed for women to be included in any research?⁴



Does your research include data from women and gender diverse people? Do your test subjects reflect the gender diversity present in real life?



Does your research account for intersectional differences between/among the different population groups present in the study? Are you prepared to accommodate the specific needs of ethnic/cultural/religious/socioeconomic/educational subgroups within the larger categorization of marginalized gender groups?



Are you prepared to accommodate the specific needs of the study population with disabilities? Is your research designed to be accessible for people with diverse bodies?



Does your research question adequately understand the disproportionate/different impacts that certain pre-existing policies may have on marginalized gender identities?



Whose interests are reflected in the research question? Does the question unintentionally harm marginalized groups in the community present in the research by imposing external desires or power dynamics onto the community?



Has the research team connected with any relevant local organizing/advocacy (women's, religious, antiracist etc.) groups that may enrich an understanding of gender in this particular field/region?



Have you connected directly with those whose lived experiences are impacted by the research you are conducting?





When building the research team

Have you considered the gender and racial balance on your research team and purposefully built a diverse group of researchers? If not, are there steps you can take to strengthen the balance on your research team at the next stage and or to ensure balance in considering the results? Is your research team practicing antiracist and gender transformative work?



Have you adequately investigated the funding balance between partners to ensure that the discrepancies do not alter the course of research?



Have you considered the power imbalances that may exist within the research team? Are you prepared to address North-South divides within project collaborators?



Have you considered the internal bias of researchers on the team before commencing research? Have you undergone unconscious bias training or engaged in meaningful discord on the topic of inclusivity?



Execution

Methodology

Are you using correct terminology and language in your research questions (i.e. avoiding exclusive stereotypes, vocabulary that relies on opposites, and language that implies there are only two genders)?



Have you adequately considered the timing and location of your research? Are you prepared to accommodate the unique needs of marginalized gender groups that may need to engage in household jobs because of their socio-economic position while you conduct research? Are you willing to conduct research while these people work and be flexible with their schedules?



Are you including gender and other relevant sociodemographic factors (ie. ability, ethnicity, LGBTQIA2+) as markers in the evidence that is collected from participants in the study? Is data disaggregated to notice changes within groups?



Have you evaluated your research questions to ensure that gender bias is not present in the data generating process or the questions itself?



Is your sample reflective of gender-diversity in the region? What are the demographics included in your research, but more importantly which groups are missing?





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During data collection

Have you considered who should conduct interviews and focus groups? Have you placed marginalized researchers with marginalized research subjects (for example, female researchers with female research subjects) to promote a more honest and open dialogue? If not, why not?



Are you using proper and accessible language or the appropriate dialogue with your participants? Is the discourse and vocabulary used by your researchers sensitive to disparities in educational levels that may disproportionately impact marginalized participants?



Have you adequately sought privacy for the experiment to have more meaningful conversations with marginalized research subjects? Have you got the proper approval to have these private conversations and have you considered which researchers need to be present for such interactions (for example, ensuring that women interview women in certain geographic regions)?⁶



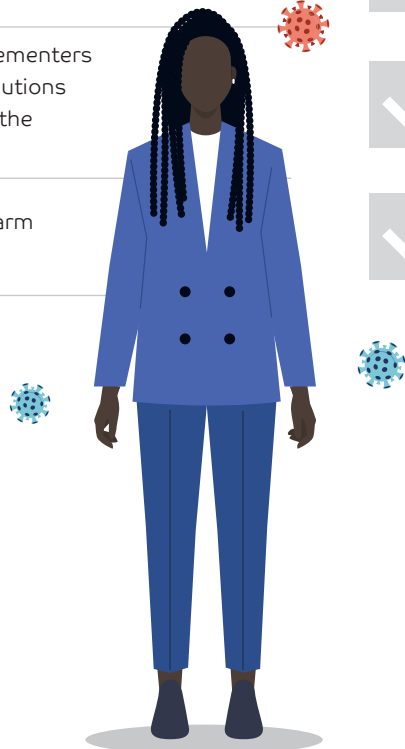
Have you considered how your own position of power may influence work with data collection and respondents?



Have you included local researchers, collaborators, and implementers in the production of knowledge? Are you valuing their contributions rather than entrenching elitism? Are you actively listening to the needs of the community in regards to your research project?



Have you ensured that your presence will not cause undue harm to the marginalized groups that you are investigating?





Dissemination

Post-research

Do your conclusions adequately consider the influence of gender on your results?



Do your recommendations present a gendered lens that understands the implication of your research on marginalized communities? Can policy recommendations be applied equally to all people without invoking undue or gendered harm?



Are your results translated into a digestible and accessible format made available to your subjects and their communities? Have you engaged your subjects in your findings?



What efforts have been made to implement research findings that would effectively challenge institutions that perpetuate discrimination?



Is your sample reflective of gender-diversity in the region? What are the demographics included in your research, but more importantly which groups are missing?





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References

- ¹ Leduc, Brigitte. Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Research . Nov. 2009, www.icimod.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Guidelines-for-Gender-Sensitive-Research.pdf.
- ² Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.
- ³ United Nations. "WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale: Criteria for Assessing Programmes and Policies." WHO Analysis Tools, World Health Organization, www.who.int/gender/mainstreaming/GMH_Participant_GenderAssessmentScale.pdf.
- ⁴ Elias, M. 2013. Practical Tips for Conducting Gender-responsive Data Collection. Bioversity International, Rome.
- ⁵ Elias, M. 2013. Practical Tips for Conducting Gender-responsive Data Collection. Bioversity International, Rome.
- ⁶ Ibid.

Resources

1. Find a collection of several helpful and comprehensive DEI resources in AMRC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Resource Hub: <https://www.amrc.org.uk/pages/category/edi-resource-hub?Take=20>
2. Comprehensive paper and report that provides guidelines on designing a gender-sensitive results-based monitoring (RBM) system: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/GIZ-guidelines-gender-sensitive-monitoring.pdf>
3. Oxfam explanation of gendered methodology and a resource designed specifically for researchers to encourage the adoption of a gendered framework: <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620621/gd-integrating-gender-research-planning-210219-en.pdf?jsessionid=B3851B66884F4790B36F4BDFEB50EFF9?sequence=1>
4. Simple explanation of the importance of incorporating a gender sensitive framework and approach: Leduc, Brigitte. Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Research . Nov. 2009, www.icimod.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Guidelines-for-Gender-Sensitive-Research.pdf

5. Practical tips, aligned with several checklist questions, for gender responsive data collection: https://www.bioversityinternational.org/fileadmin/_migrated/uploads/tx_news/Practical_tips_for_gender_responsive_data_collection_1658_02.pdf
6. Recommendations for language changes to create more gender neutral questions: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2020/07/08/how-to-use-gender-neutral-language-and-why-its-important-to-try/?sh=4d682ee226ba>
7. Explains why it is important to include minority voices in research and why there is a history of underrepresenting marginalized racial demographics from the research process: <https://ftdregistry.org/press/minority-voices-ensuring-racial-and-cultural-diversity-research-0>
8. Provides free stock images representing diverse people to encourage diverse recruitment efforts in the research process so that participants feel wanted and valued in the study: <https://recruit.ucsf.edu/free-images-increase-diversity-study-materials>
9. Provides different strategies (simplified language, proximity to public transportation, audio captioning, etc.) to address accessibility barriers at several stages throughout the research generating process (recruitment, consent, transportation, intervention, etc.). <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5104996/table/tbl1/?report=objectonly>
10. Provides a checklist for in-person research events to ensure accessibility during face to face interactions: <https://www.amrc.org.uk/accessibility-checklist-for-face-to-face-engagement>
11. Helps Understand identities and intersections within the LGBTQIA2+ community by familiarizing researchers with terminology: <https://hsc.unm.edu/programs/nmcareshd/docs/lgbtq-guidelines.pdf>
12. Guidance specifically on conducting gender analysis in health systems research: Morgan R et al., *Health Policy and Planning*, Volume 31, Issue 8, October 2016, Pages 1069–1078, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czw037>.

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