



Using intersectionality in policymaking and analysis: Summary findings



Equality, Poverty and Social Security



Introduction

This summary presents key findings on the concept and applications of intersectionality. Together with the [main report](#), it is intended as a resource to build knowledge and expertise among public sector analysts and policymakers.

This summary will contribute to understanding of:



What intersectionality means and how it can be applied to policymaking.



How intersectionality can be integrated throughout the analytical process.



Examples of how the concept of intersectionality has been used.



What is meant by the concept of intersectionality?

The term 'intersectionality' is not yet in everyday usage, but awareness is growing. The concept has been used to articulate and analyse the lived reality of those who experience multiple inequalities, particularly within Black feminism. The analysis framework and term "intersectionality" was originally coined by American critical legal race scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, who used the term to refer the double discrimination of racism and sexism faced by Black women.¹

Based on this previous work^{2,3,4,5}, the foundational elements of intersectionality can be understood as:

- A recognition that **people are shaped by their simultaneous membership of multiple interconnected social categories.**
- The interaction between multiple social categories occurs within a **context of connected systems and structures of power** (e.g. laws, policies, governments). A recognition of inequality of power is key to intersectionality.
- **Structural inequalities**, reflected as relative disadvantage and privilege, are the **outcomes of the interaction between social categories, power relations and contexts.** As a result, an individual's experiences of inequality can be chronic or transitory, creating unique lived experiences.

¹ Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989:139–67, p. 149

² Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. *Annual review of sociology*, 41, 1-20.

³ Else-Quest, N. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2016). Intersectionality in quantitative psychological research: I. Theoretical and epistemological issues. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(2), 155–170. doi:10.1177/0361684316629797

⁴ Hankivsky, O. (2014). Intersectionality 101. *The Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy, SFU*, 36.

⁵ Scott, Nicholas; Siltanen, Janet (2016), 'Intersectionality and quantitative methods: assessing regression from a feminist perspective', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, Intersectionality and Quantitative Methods (researchgate.net)*, p. 5 -6



What does it mean to take an intersectional approach to policymaking?

The 'intersectional approach' can be best understood as a way of identifying, understanding and tackling structural inequality in a given context that accounts for the lived experience of people with intersecting identities. For example, intersectionality helps us to understand how people experience services, such as education and healthcare, differently as a result of their identity and unequal power dynamics. Understanding these differences helps us to develop more effective policies.

An intersectional approach means that policymakers (and analysts):

- **Do not give a higher status to any one social category's inequality or experience of discrimination** but encourages us to focus on complex relationships and interactions.⁶ For example, it might be an aim to increase young men's participation in the labour market. But to be successful, an employability policy for a young disabled man may need to consider very different factors to an employability policy for a young, care-experienced man.
- **"Analyse their own power dynamics as much as the world they wish to change"**.⁷ An intersectional approach asks policymakers to assess how their own experiences impact on their ability to develop, deliver and evaluate policies in an equitable way.
- **Put evidence into context**, including the historical and contemporary structures of inequality in wider society, and within local contexts.⁸ Local contexts could include, for example, education, employment, and healthcare settings. It is crucial to examine the interaction between individuals and institutions (e.g. central government, local government, public bodies) as this will provide an indicator of likely policy success and failure.

⁶ First Ministers Advisory Council on Women and Girls (202), '2020 Report and Recommendations', [562006_SCT1120576152-002_NACWG.pdf \(onescotland.org\)](#), p. 8

⁷ Scott-Villiers, P. and Oosterom, M (2016) 'Power, Poverty and Inequality' IDS Bulletin Vol. 47 No. 5. <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/2790/ONLINE%20ARTICL>

⁸ Christoffersen, Ashlee (2017), *Intersectional Approaches to equality research and data*, [Research and data briefing 2 Intersectional approaches to equality research and data.pdf \(ecu.ac.uk\)](#), p. 4



How can intersectionality be integrated throughout the analytical process?

This section outlines how intersectionality can be integrated throughout the analytical process. More detail on analytical techniques is provided in the main report.

Addressing the power imbalance in research

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an important part of conducting intersectional research: a researcher should ask themselves questions about their own social positions, values, assumptions, interests and experiences and how these can shape the research process, as well as putting the research into context.⁹

Public involvement in research

Public involvement refers to the active contribution from people with lived experience in research projects and in research organisations.¹⁰ This is distinct from more traditional research approaches in which people take part in a research study as ‘participants’ or ‘data subjects’ (e.g. being interviewed or answering questions about their experiences) and where information gathered through research is disseminated **to** people rather than **with** them.

Ensuring marginalised groups are reached

Adopting an intersectional approach to analysis requires that people with different intersecting identities, particularly from multiple marginalised groups, be included in research so that their voices are heard.¹¹ This means that analysts need to consider and take practical steps to aid diverse research recruitment.

⁹ Christoffersen, Ashlee (2017), *Intersectional Approaches to equality research and data*, [Research and data briefing 2. Intersectional approaches to equality research and data.pdf \(ecu.ac.uk\)](https://www.ecu.ac.uk/research-and-data-briefing-2-intersectional-approaches-to-equality-research-and-data.pdf), p. 5

¹⁰ INVOLVE (2016). *Public involvement in research: values and principles framework*. Available from: [Public involvement in research: values and principles framework – INVOLVE](https://www.involve.org.uk/public-involvement-in-research-values-and-principles-framework)

¹¹ Else-Quest, N. M., & Hyde, J. S. (2016). Intersectionality in quantitative psychological research: II. Methods and techniques. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(3), 319-336.

Sampling techniques and reporting

The sampling techniques used in research are important considerations when taking an intersectional approach. A completely random sampling approach or use of a sampling frame designed to be representative of a whole population may lead to problems with low sample size for lower-frequency groups in the population or among those who may be more reluctant to take part in or contribute to research. If this is the case, the validity and applicability of other sampling techniques should be considered to assist coverage. The extent to which data can be utilised for intersectional analysis should also be a priority.

Analysts should carry out intersectional data analysis where possible. A range of statistical techniques, and their respective advantages and disadvantages, are discussed in the main report including regression, multi-level models and moderated mediation. Analysts should consider a range of options for carrying out intersectional data analysis ahead of data collection. In addition, an assessment of the sampling approach and likely sample size could help determine which technique is most appropriate.



Spotlight example of how the concept of intersectionality has been used to identify and understand structural inequality in Scotland

An intersectional approach can cast light on the lived experiences of people with intersecting identities, and can be used to develop policies and services that tackle structural inequality. One example of where an intersectional approach has been used to identify and understand structural inequality is provided here. See the main report for more examples.

Spotlight Example: Understanding racial inequalities during COVID-19

Research looking at the impact of COVID-19 has found that minority ethnic people are more likely to contract and experience serious outcomes from COVID-19. During the first six months of the pandemic, people from minority ethnic groups in England were almost three times as likely to contract COVID-19 and five times more likely to experience serious health outcomes.¹² In Scotland, National Records of Scotland (NRS) found that between 12th March 2020 and 30th September 2021 deaths amongst people with Pakistani ethnicity were 3.7 times as likely to involve COVID-19 as people with White Scottish ethnicity. Deaths amongst people with Chinese ethnicity (1.7 times as likely), Indian ethnicity (1.7 times as likely) and Other Asian¹³ ethnicity (3.0 times as likely) were more likely to involve COVID-19 than people with White Scottish ethnicity.¹⁴

Taking account of a range of factors demonstrates that the link between being a member of a minority ethnic group and a heightened risk of contracting and

¹² Lally, Clare (2020) 'Impact of COVID-19 on different ethnic minority groups', [Impact of COVID-19 on different ethnic minority groups - POST \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-cross/interior-and-civil-affairs/committees-publications/committees---interior-and-civil-affairs/cross-party-groups/interior-and-civil-affairs-cross-party-group-reports/impact-of-covid-19-on-different-ethnic-minority-groups)

¹³ Other Asian: all ethnicities from Asia that do not fall under Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi are grouped under Other Asian.

¹⁴ [Deaths involving coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Scotland, Report \(nrscotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/deaths-involving-coronavirus-covid-19-in-scotland-report)

experiencing serious outcomes from COVID-19 is not direct. Looking across evidence from Scotland, England and across the UK, a number of mediating factors were identified, including:

- **Socio-economic circumstance** – As in the rest of the UK, minority ethnic people remain more likely to be in poverty than the majority White Scottish population¹⁵ ¹⁶. Data from the ONS and the PHE analysis confirmed the strong association between economic disadvantage and COVID-19 diagnoses, incidence and severe disease.¹⁷
- Research suggests that individuals from minority ethnic groups are more likely to have had to **work outside of their home during the national lockdown**, and are more likely to **work in occupations with a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure**, such as health and social care.^{18,19,20}
- COVID-19 disparities between different minority ethnic groups may be due to **reduced access to healthcare**. Analyses by the Institute for Public Policy Research indicate that in England the ten most deprived authorities have experienced 15% of all public health budget cuts in the past 5 years. According to Census data, many of these areas are more ethnically diverse than the population average.²¹

¹⁵ Kelly, M. (2016) Poverty and Ethnicity: Key Messages for Scotland. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, p. 8. [Poverty and ethnicity: key messages for Scotland \(cpag.org.uk\)](https://cpag.org.uk/poverty-and-ethnicity-key-messages-for-scotland)

¹⁶ Netto, G., Sosenko, F. and Bramley, G. (2011) Poverty and Ethnicity in Scotland: Review of the Literature and Datasets. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. [Poverty and ethnicity in Scotland: Review of the literature and datasets \(jrf.org.uk\)](https://jrf.org.uk/poverty-and-ethnicity-in-scotland-review-of-the-literature-and-datasets)

¹⁷ Lally, Clare (2020) 'Impact of COVID-19 on different ethnic minority groups', [Impact of COVID-19 on different ethnic minority groups - POST \(parliament.uk\)](https://parliament.uk/impact-of-covid-19-on-different-ethnic-minority-groups-post)

¹⁸ Haque, Zubaida; Becares, Laia; Treloar, Nick (2020), 'Over-Exposed and Under-Protected The Devastating Impact of COVID-19 on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Great Britain', [The Runnymede Trust | Over-Exposed and Under-Protected](https://www.runnymede.org.uk/over-exposed-and-under-protected)

¹⁹ Public Health England (2020), 'Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups', [Beyond the Data: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Communities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/beyond-the-data-understanding-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-bame-communities)

²⁰ The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2021), 'Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others?'. [Are some ethnic groups more vulnerable to COVID-19 than others? | Inequality: the IFS Deaton Review](https://www.ifs.org.uk/inequality-the-ifs-deaton-review)

²¹ Thomas, Chris (2019), 'Hitting the poorest worst? How public health cuts have been experienced in England's most deprived communities', [Hitting the poorest worst? How public health cuts have been experienced in England's most deprived communities | IPPR](https://www.ippr.org/hitting-the-poorest-worst-how-public-health-cuts-have-been-experienced-in-englands-most-deprived-communities)

- **Effects of lockdown** - according to The Runnymede Trust, people from Bangladeshi (43%) and Black African²² groups (38%) were most likely to report loss of income since COVID-19, compared with 22% of White people. Those from Black and minority ethnic groups were also more likely to have used savings for day-to-day spending (14%) compared with those from White British backgrounds (8%).^{23,24}

In addition, Keys and colleagues highlighted that, when considering health inequalities and potential ethnicity-related vulnerabilities to COVID-19 in the UK, it is important to understand the historical context.²⁵ This is a key tenet of intersectionality. Previous global influenza pandemics and infectious diseases epidemics have clearly shown a clear association between poverty and increased transmission of infectious diseases.^{26,27}

The context of racism and discrimination experienced by minority ethnic communities, particularly minority ethnic key workers, is vital to understanding health risks, exposure risk and disease progression risk. Issues of stigma with COVID-19 were identified as negatively impacting health seeking behaviours. Fear of diagnosis and death from COVID-19 was identified as negatively impacting how minority ethnic groups took up opportunities to get tested and their likelihood of presenting early for

²² This is the terminology used with The Runnymede Report, rather than which is used by the Scottish Government.

²³ These findings are based on the findings of a survey conducted by ICM Unlimited on behalf of the race equality think tank Runnymede Trust. ICM interviewed a sample of 2,585 adults living in Great Britain aged 18+ using its online omnibus service between 3 and 17 June 2020. In addition, A 'boost' sample of 538 black and minority ethnic (BME) adults was conducted, taking the overall sample of BME respondents to 750. To ensure a representative sample, demographic quotas were set, and the data has been weighted to the profile of all adults in Great Britain aged 18+.

²⁴ Haque, Zubaida; Becares, Laia; Treloar, Nick (2020), 'Over-Exposed and Under-Protected The Devastating Impact of COVID-19 on Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Great Britain', [The Runnymede Trust | Over-Exposed and Under-Protected](#)

²⁵ Keys, Clare; Nanyakkara, Gowri; Onyejekwe, Chisa; Kumar Sah, Rajeeb; Wright, Toni (2021), 'Health Inequalities and Ethnic Vulnerabilities During COVID-19 in the UK: A Reflection on the PHE Reports', *Feminist Legal Studies*, (29), 107 – 118

²⁶ Crenshaw, Kimberle Williams (2020) Intersectionality matters: under the blacklight: history rinsed and repeated [Podcast]. 28 April 2020. [Stream 14. Under the Blacklight: History Rinsed and Repeated by Intersectionality Matters with Kimberlé Crenshaw | Listen online for free on SoundCloud](#)

²⁷ Quinn, Sandra, C., and Kumar Supriya (2014) Health inequalities and infectious disease epidemics: a challenge for global health security. *Biosecurity and bioterrorism: biodefense strategy, practice, and science*. 12 (5): 263–273.

treatment and care. For many minority ethnic groups, lack of trust in NHS services and health care treatment resulted in their reluctance to seek care on a timely basis, and late presentation with disease.²⁸

The Scottish Government established an Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity (ERG) in response to reports that some minority ethnic groups are at risk of experiencing disproportionate effects of COVID-19. In September 2020, the ERG published advice and recommendations to the Scottish Government in relation to data, evidence, risk and systemic issues.²⁹ This highlighted that **“vulnerabilities to COVID-19 are consistent with an established pattern in which ‘intersections between socioeconomic status, ethnicity and racism intensify inequalities in health for ethnic groups’”**³⁰, and suggested a range of institutional and systemic factors that could be driving this increased vulnerability among minority ethnic groups including:

- Differential exposures to COVID-19, due to occupation exposure, income and housing issues faced by those seeking asylum, living conditions, poverty, racism and discrimination, and a lack of understanding of Scotland’s ethnic diversity.
- Differential vulnerabilities due to health inequalities.
- Differential access to treatment and other forms of support, including a greater risk to adverse outcomes even after hospitalisation, barriers to accessing NHS services among migrants, and experiences of discrimination when accessing health services.³¹

²⁸ Public Health England (2020), ‘Beyond the data: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on BAME groups’, [Beyond the Data: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Communities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#), p. 7 - 8

²⁹ Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity (2020) ‘Initial advice & recommendations on systemic issues’, [Systemic+Issues+and+Risk+-+Initial+Advice+and+Recommendations+from+the+Expert+Reference+Group+on+COVID-19+and+Ethnicity+\(002\).pdf](#)

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid



Conclusions

Five key considerations are presented below which policymakers and analysts should take into account when taking an intersectional approach.

Consideration 1 - contextualisation: When taking an intersectional approach to policymaking and analysis, alongside taking account of combinations of characteristics that shape experiences, these intersecting identities should be contextualised and understood within the systems and structures of power. This should be central to the ways in which policies are designed, implemented and evaluated to ensure those with lived experience are taken into account.

Consideration 2 - reflexivity: In order to take an intersectional approach policymakers and analysts should regularly consider their own membership of interconnected categories and practice reflexivity.³² This will allow them to better understand how their own power and lived experience impacts the research and/or policymaking process.

Consideration 3 – public involvement: Public involvement, when used sincerely and applied inclusively, can help to address the power imbalance between decision makers, such as policymakers and analysts, and marginalised groups. Participatory approaches to research ensure that those with lived experience of intersecting identities have a central voice in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies. While traditionally more common in qualitative research, efforts to redistribute power can also be made in quantitative research through, for example, involving community members throughout the research process, from conceptualisation through data gathering and dissemination.

Consideration 4 – reaching marginalised groups: Analysts should ensure that marginalised groups are reached by reducing the barriers to their participation. This involves, for example, ensuring venues are fully accessible and suitably located, translations are provided where necessary, using trusted mediators where necessary, and providing incentives and reimbursements to contributors in exchange for their input.

³² [reflexivity \(warwick.ac.uk\)](http://warwick.ac.uk)

Consideration 5 – statistical approaches: The range of statistical approaches discussed demonstrates that no one method fits all. Analysts should consider a range of options for carrying out intersectional data analysis, taking account of and setting out the advantages and disadvantages of techniques ahead of data collection. In addition, an assessment of the sampling approach and likely sample size could help determine which technique is most appropriate.



© Crown copyright 2022

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence.

To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/> or e-mail: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

The views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and do not necessarily represent those of the Scottish Government or Scottish Ministers.

This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.

ISBN: 978-1-80435-154-3

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1037991 (03/22)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
March 2022



Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-80435-154-3

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1037991 (03/22)