



unicef 
for every child



**Global Impact
Evaluation Forum
2024** at the
United Nations

Ethics in Impact Evaluation

Day 3: Parallel Session 1



*“**Without ethics**, everything happens as if we were all five billion passengers on a big machinery and nobody is driving the machinery. And it’s going faster and faster, but **we don’t know where.**”*



~Jacques-Yves Cousteau
(French navel officer, author,
oceanographer & filmmaker)

Panelists



Douglas MacKay

UNC Chapel Hill



Monica Lambon-Quayefio

University of Ghana



Amber Peterman

*UNC Chapel Hill &
UNICEF EO*



**Ana Garcia
Hernandez**

J-PAL Europe

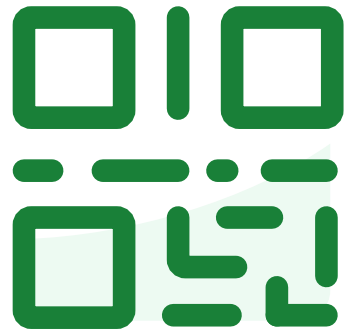


Indran A. Naidoo

IFAD

slido

Please download and install the
Slido app on all computers you use



**Join at slido.com
#8157737**

ⓘ Start presenting to display the joining instructions on this slide.

Pre-test Question: In an evaluation context, what does *positionality* mean?

- a) The readiness of a particular intervention to be evaluated—including the potential for scale-up
- b) A researcher's perspective or worldview they bring to the evaluation and research
- c) The situation of a topic or intervention in relation to the political setting it is being evaluated
- d) How you position the evaluation in relation to the methodological spectrum ranging from quantitative to qualitative

[Moderator]

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



In an evaluation context, what does positionality mean?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

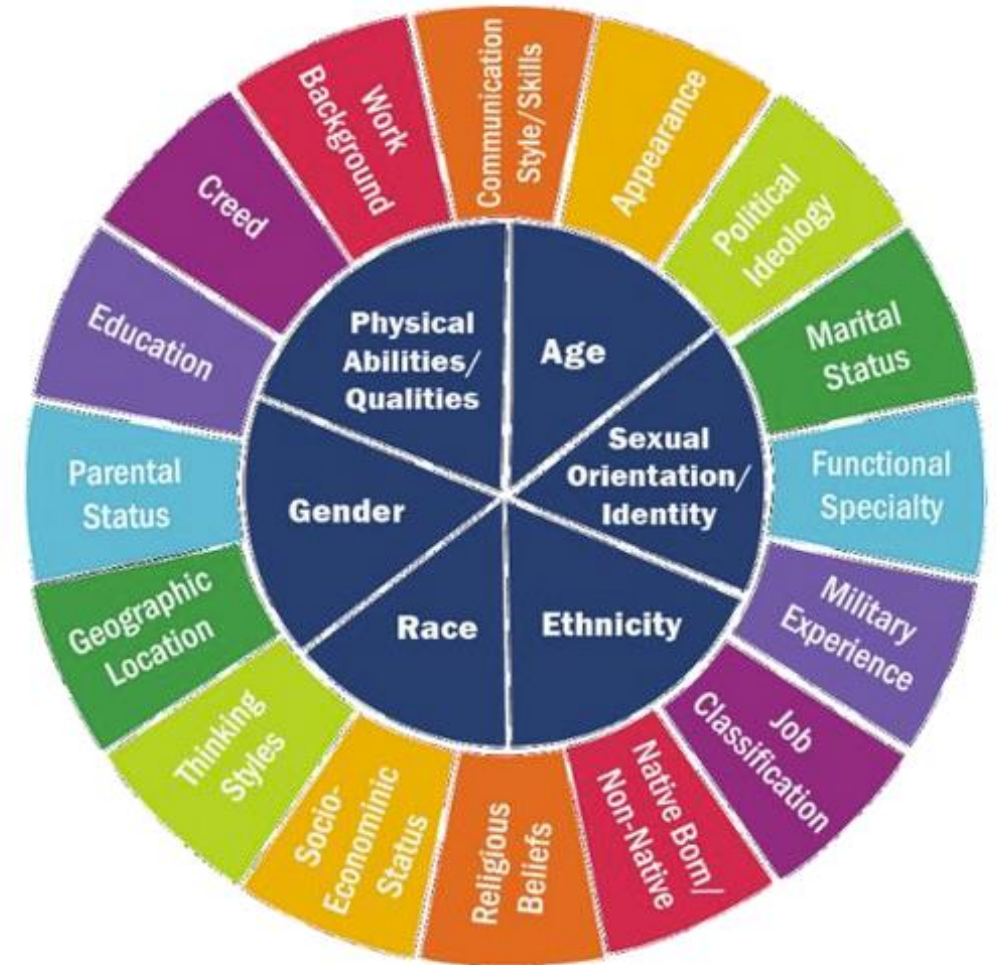
Pre-test Question: In an evaluation context, what does *positionality* mean?

- a) The readiness of a particular intervention to be evaluated—including the potential for scale-up
- b) A researcher's perspective or worldview they bring to the evaluation and research
- c) The situation of a topic or intervention in relation to the political setting it is being evaluated
- d) How you position the evaluation in relation to the methodological spectrum ranging from quantitative to qualitative

[Moderator]

Positionality

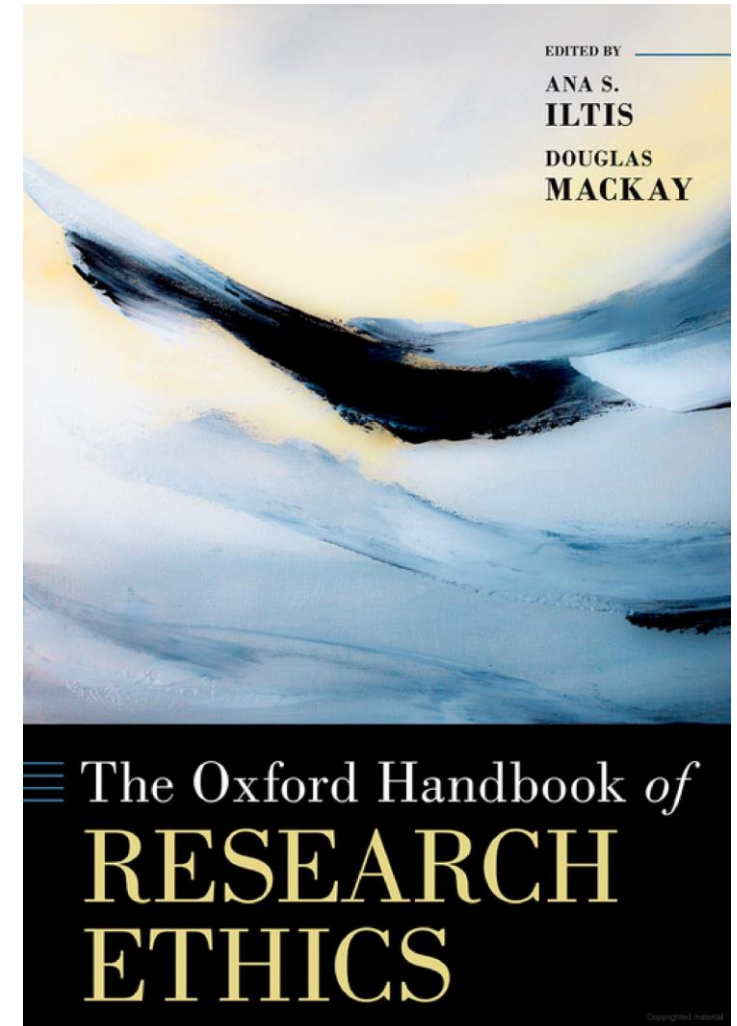
- “The ways that differences in social position and power shape identities” – which are the lens researchers apply to their research
- Increasingly researchers are asked to provide positionality statements (for grant funding, journal publications etc.), as this can have many implications – including for ethics
- *For impact evaluations in settings of fragility, inclusion of individuals with lived experiences can improve ethics within a particular study*



Source: [MH institute for teaching excellence](#)

Douglas MacKay: The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics

- Chapter 23: “The Ethics of Public Policy Experiments: Lessons from Clinical Research Ethics”
- Principal considerations for ethical policy research:
 1. Social Value
 2. Favorable Risk-Benefit Ratio
 3. Standard of Care
 4. Fair Randomization
 5. Fair Subject Selection
 6. Informed Consent
 7. Community Engagement

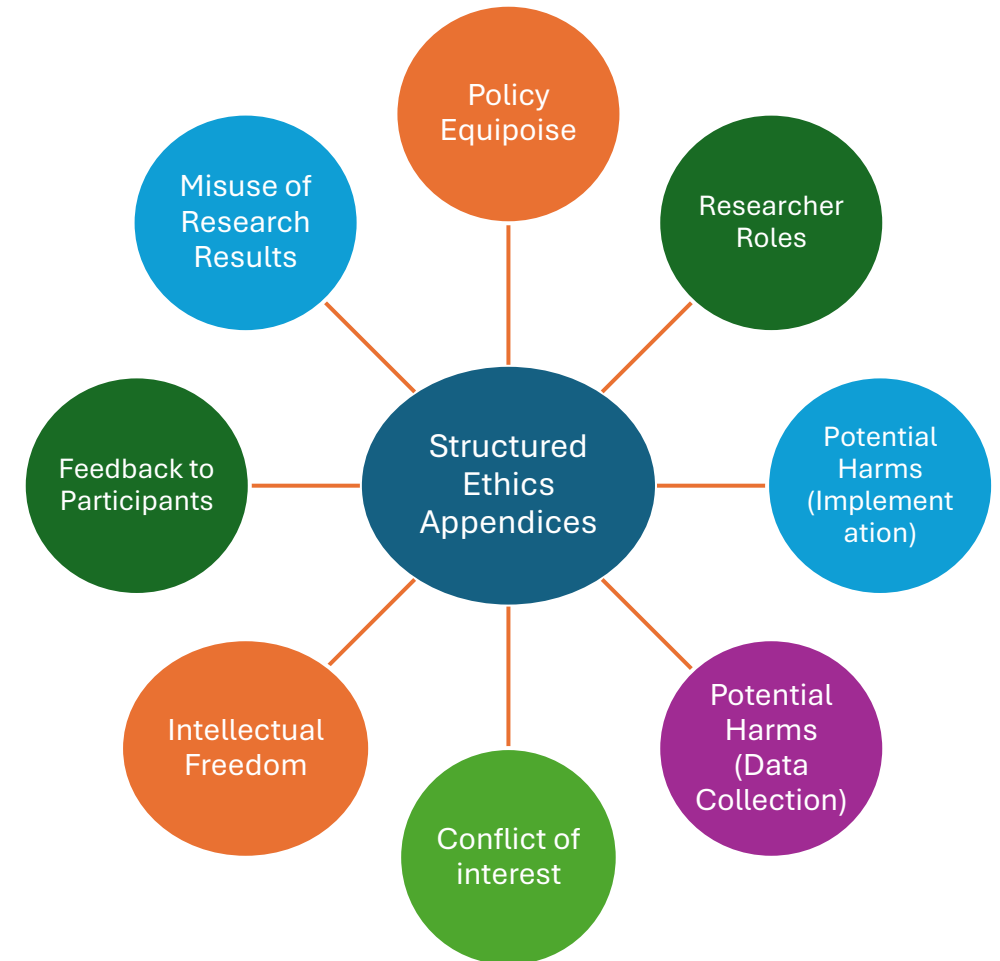


Monica Lambon-Quayefio: Call for Structured Ethics Appendices for Social Science Papers

- Beyond procedural compliance, IRB fails to address broader ethical considerations associated with primary data collection in social science research
- Structured appendices provide an opportunity for a comprehensive assessment and discussion of key ethical issues
- Advocated to be adopted as a standard practice, expected to facilitate communication about ethics and improve ethical norms in social research



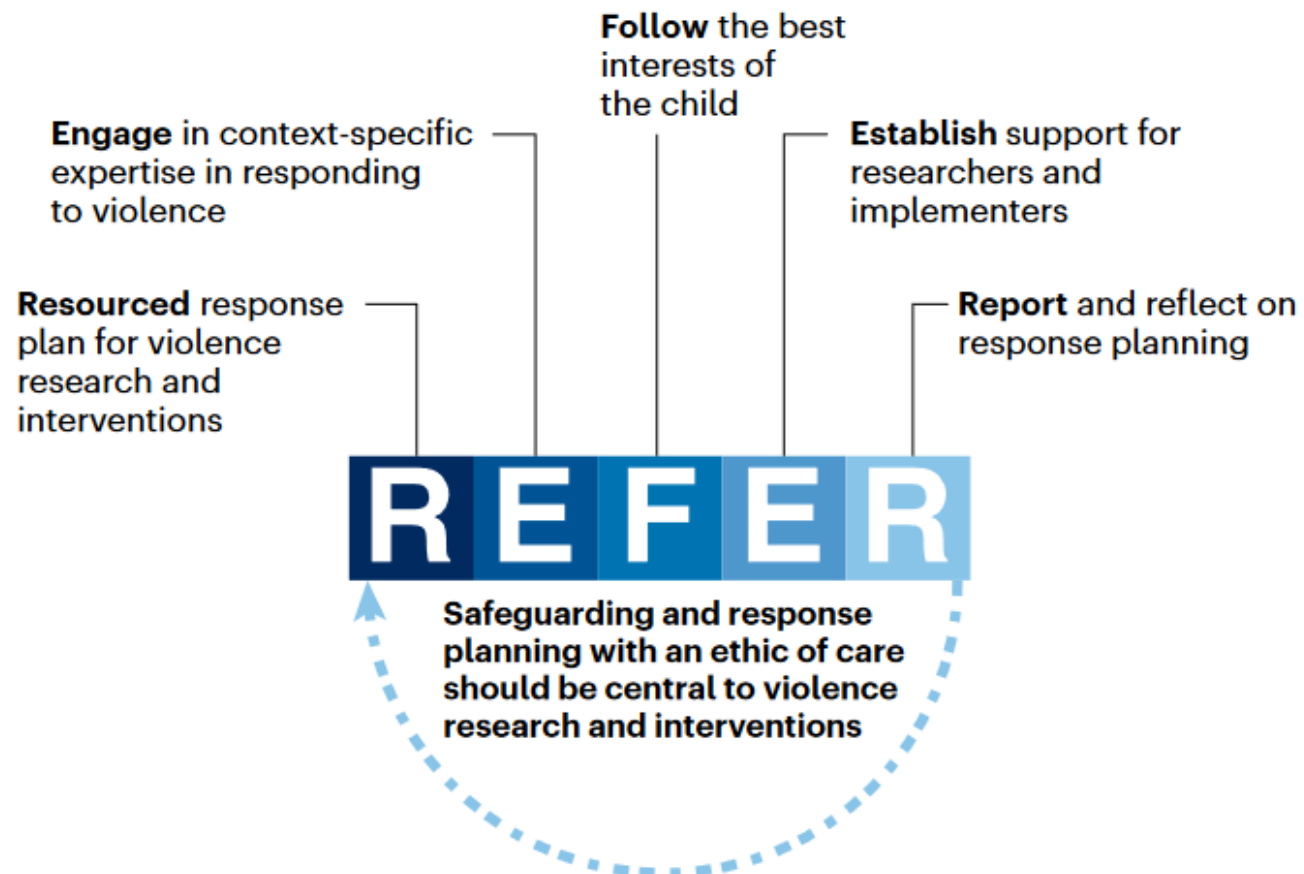
VS



Source: [Asiedu et al. 2021](#)

Amber Peterman: REFER - 5 pillars to guide response planning in research where children may disclose violence

- Research to measure, prevent & respond to violence against children (VAC) requires engaging with diverse traumatic experiences
- Safeguarding applies to the entire research process, including design, recruitment, sampling, data collection, intervention delivery, analysis & dissemination
- REFER offers a framework to consider practical strategies to a 'do no harm' approach



Source: [Bhatia et al. 2024](#)

Ana García Hernández: Pre-registration as a tool for research transparency

- Pre-registration consists in declaring a study design and outcomes before the project starts by creating a record about the trial in a public trial registry.
- It allows researchers to improve the credibility of their research and for social sciences to combat the file-drawer problem.
- AEA RCT Registry
 - Central database of randomized evaluations in economics
 - Founded in 2012
 - More than 9000 registered studies



www.Socialscienceregistry.org

Case

- A humanitarian agency wishes to provide assistance to drought-stricken communities in Niger.
 - It is deliberating about whether to provide affected households with cash transfers or food bundles of equal value.
- 1. Are there conditions under which it is permissible for the agency to compare these interventions in a randomized controlled trial (RCT)?**
 - 2. Are there conditions under which it is permissible for the agency to conduct an RCT with a pure control (no intervention)?**

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



Are there conditions under which it is permissible for the agency to compare these interventions [cash vs. food] in a randomized controlled trial (RCT)?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



Are there conditions under which it is permissible for the agency to conduct an RCT with a pure control (no intervention)?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Lotteries and Decision-Making

- Assumption: Humanitarian agencies have obligation to address human suffering (Humanity), giving priority to the most urgent cases (Impartiality).
- Lotteries are valuable in cases of *indeterminacy* – when the process of reasoning does not pick out one option as preferable.
- Randomization is permissible in the context of policy RCTs when decision-makers are in a state of indeterminacy:
 1. Indeterminacy regarding the intervention and control arm; or,
 2. Indeterminacy regarding who should have access to the intervention arm.

Two Conditions of Fair Randomization

- **Policy Equipoise:** If relevant expert community is uncertain regarding the effectiveness of cash transfers and food bundles in this setting, it is permissible to conduct an RCT comparing them.
- **Scarcity:** If either cash transfers or food bundles is superior, may still be permissible to randomize if the intervention is (a) scarce, and (b) potential recipients have equally strong claims to it.

Evidence Matters

Towards equitable, inclusive and sustainable development

Policy equipoise and ethical implementation experiments: Evidence of effectiveness, not merely efficacy

Douglas MacKay 16 February 2022 ↩

Evidence Matters

Towards equitable, inclusive and sustainable development

How does scarcity inform ethical withholding of treatment?

Douglas MacKay 11 February 2022 ↩



Original Article

Government Policy Experiments and the Ethics of Randomization

Douglas MacKay ✉

Pure Control Group?

- **Assumption:** Humanitarian agencies have obligation to address human suffering (Humanity), giving priority to the most urgent cases (Impartiality).
- **Standard of Care:** Humanitarian agencies may not assign people to a study arm that is reasonably expected to be inferior to the most effective intervention they have the resources and authority to implement.
- **Implication:** Pure control group permissible only if either (a) no known effective intervention, or (b) effective intervention is scarce.

Evidence Matters

Towards equitable, inclusive and sustainable development

Standards of care in policy research

Douglas MacKay, Anna Marion 12 September 2022 ↩

Question 3: What BEST approach should be adopted in sharing findings with study participants after completing a research project?

- a) Publish the research report/paper online making it public access
- b) Organise an information sharing session with leaders in communities where the study was conducted
- c) Develop diverse communication materials (reports, summaries, infographics, videos) and collaborate with community members to determine appropriate dissemination methods
- d) Summarize results in a simple press release and distribute it in local media houses

[Monica]

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



What BEST approach should be adopted in sharing findings with study participants after completing a research project?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Question 3: What BEST approach should be adopted in sharing findings with study participants after completing a research project?

- a) Publish the research report/paper online making it public access
- b) Organise an information sharing session with leaders in communities where the study was conducted
- c) Develop diverse communication materials (reports, summaries, infographics, videos) and collaborate with community members to determine appropriate dissemination methods
- d) Summarize results in a simple press release and distribute it in local media houses

[Monica]

Use of diverse communication tools and collaboration on dissemination methods

This approach considers key ethical principles:

- Using different communication tools acknowledges participants/community members as a non-homogeneous group – different needs, understanding and communication styles
- Ensures equitable access to information and inclusion- some groups of are not privileged or disadvantaged
- Limiting to a few people undermines individual autonomy and risks limited interpretation by leaders' perspectives only
- Collaborating with community members about dissemination methods reduces the risk of over simplifying research findings which may lead to misinterpretation

[Monica]

Question 4: What percentage of publications in the top 20 development economics journals are published by global south researchers?

- a) Less than 20%
- b) More than 50%
- c) Just about 50 %
- d) About 40%

[Monica]

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



What percentage of publications in the top 20 development economics journals are published by global south researchers?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Question 4: What percentage of publications in the top 20 development economics journals are published by global south researchers.

- a) Less than 20%
- b) More than 50%
- c) Just about 50 %
- d) About 40%

Table 2. Share of development journal publications, by topic and researcher region, 1990–2019.

Topic of paper	Researcher region			Total
	SR	SR-NR	NR	
Southern country or region	22%	16%	62%	100%
General development topic	7%	4%	89%	100%
Total	16%	11%	73%	100%

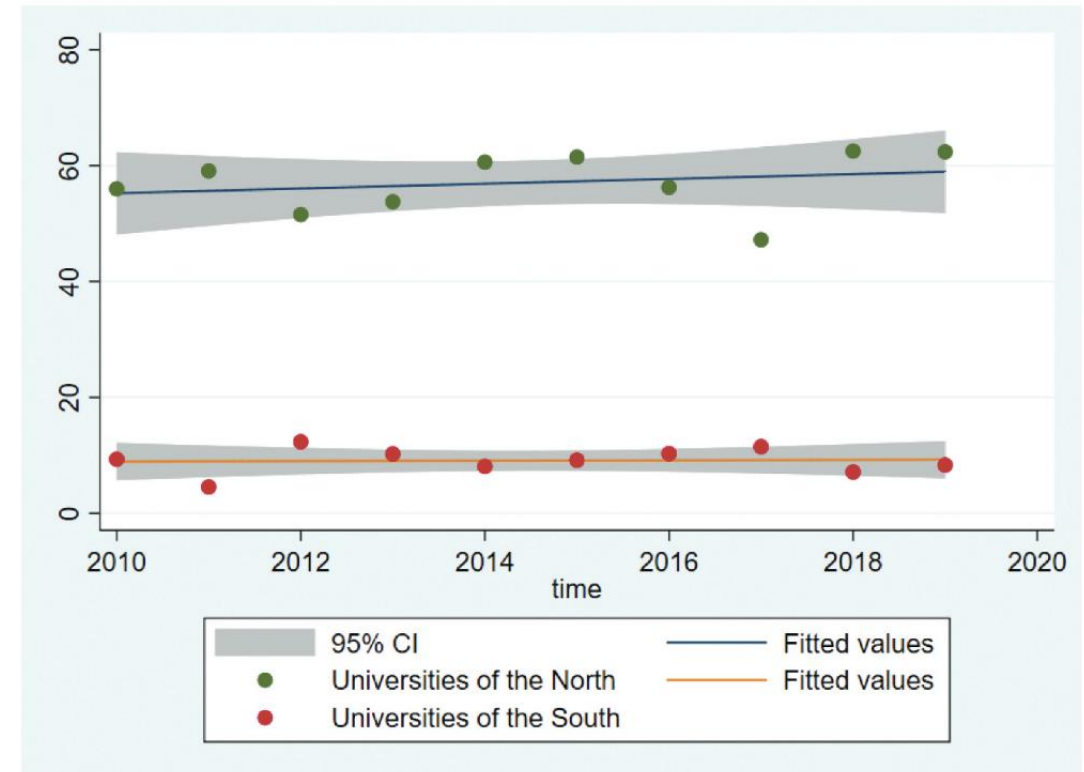
Source: based on Elsevier Scopus database

Source: [Amarante et al. 2021](#)

[Monica]

Global South researchers are underrepresented in three areas of research: conference presentation, publications and citations

- Wide disparity exists in representation in economic development research (in developing contexts) - dominated by researchers from the global north
- Increased recognition to encourage global south participation in development research to shape research agenda and development policy in these contexts
- More deliberate efforts required to create opportunities for inclusion:
 - **Explicit requirement by journals for the inclusion of global south researchers**
 - **Increased research funding to research led by local researchers**
 - **Increased travel grants for local researchers for conference attendance**



Source: Amarante et al. 2021

Question 5: When collecting survey data on violence against women, the ethical recommendation is to give referral information on locally available social services to who?

- a) To participant women who disclose violence during the survey
- b) To all participant women, regardless of if they disclose violence
- c) To the household in general, including others who may wish to access services
- d) To participant women who ask for assistance or services after or during the interview

[Amber]

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



When collecting survey data on violence against women, the ethical recommendation is to give referral information on locally available social services to who?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Question 5: When collecting survey data on violence against women, the ethical recommendation is to give referral information on locally available social services *to who?*

- a) To participant women who disclose violence during the survey
- b) To all participant women, regardless of if they disclose violence
- c) To the household in general, including others who may wish to access services
- d) To participant women who ask for assistance or services after or during the interview

[Amber]

Referrals in violence against women research

- WHO guidance recommends giving de-identified local referral information for violence and social services to *all* participant women (e.g. small card with phone numbers & addresses – ideally including both local & hotline services)
- De-identification helps avoid suspicion if cards are seen by others
- Research teams are responsible for identifying services, assessing their quality and ensuring they are alerted of the survey effort
- Research teams (with implementing partners) are responsible for mobile service teams in areas where no services exist

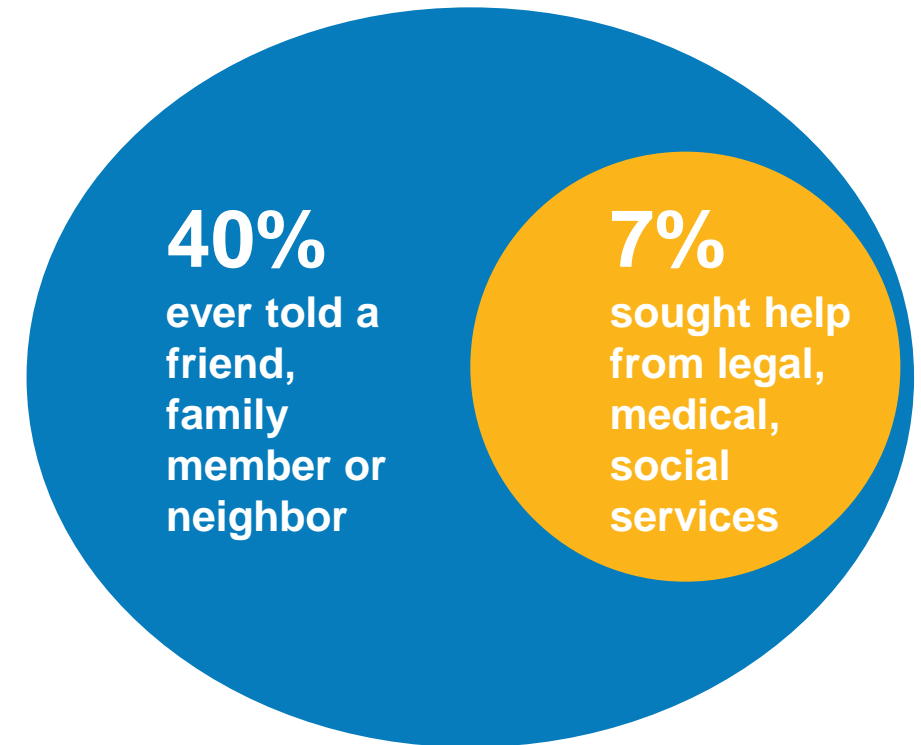


[resource [GBV pocket guide](#)]

Why give all women referral information & not just those that disclose?

Nationally-representative data from women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in 24 LMIC countries (n = ~285,000)

- Disclosure of violence is generally understood to be the ‘tip of the iceberg’
- Thus, it is likely that many women who do not disclose to interviewers are experiencing violence—and those who do not disclose could be the ones in most need of services
- *In addition to participants – interviewers and survey teams themselves should have similar access to all services*



Source: [Palermo et al. 2014](#)

Mandatory reporting

Mandatory reporting refers to ‘legislation passed by some countries that requires individuals to report ***known or suspected*** cases of violence to (typically) police or legal system’

Challenges in research:

- Requires inclusion in informed consent – may drive refusals or suspicion towards the research
- May undermine the quality of the data – leading to underreporting and incorrect conclusions
- May cause harm to the survivor if investigation is not handled properly, including physical, mental, economic harm
- Can undermine survivor agency and ultimately lead to less help-seeking for fear of legal consequences

[Amber]

Question 6: In a systematic review of studies collecting primary violence data during COVID-19 (n = 75)—what percentage of studies explained how they addressed mandatory reporting?

- a) 8%
- b) 16%
- c) 28%
- d) 34%

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



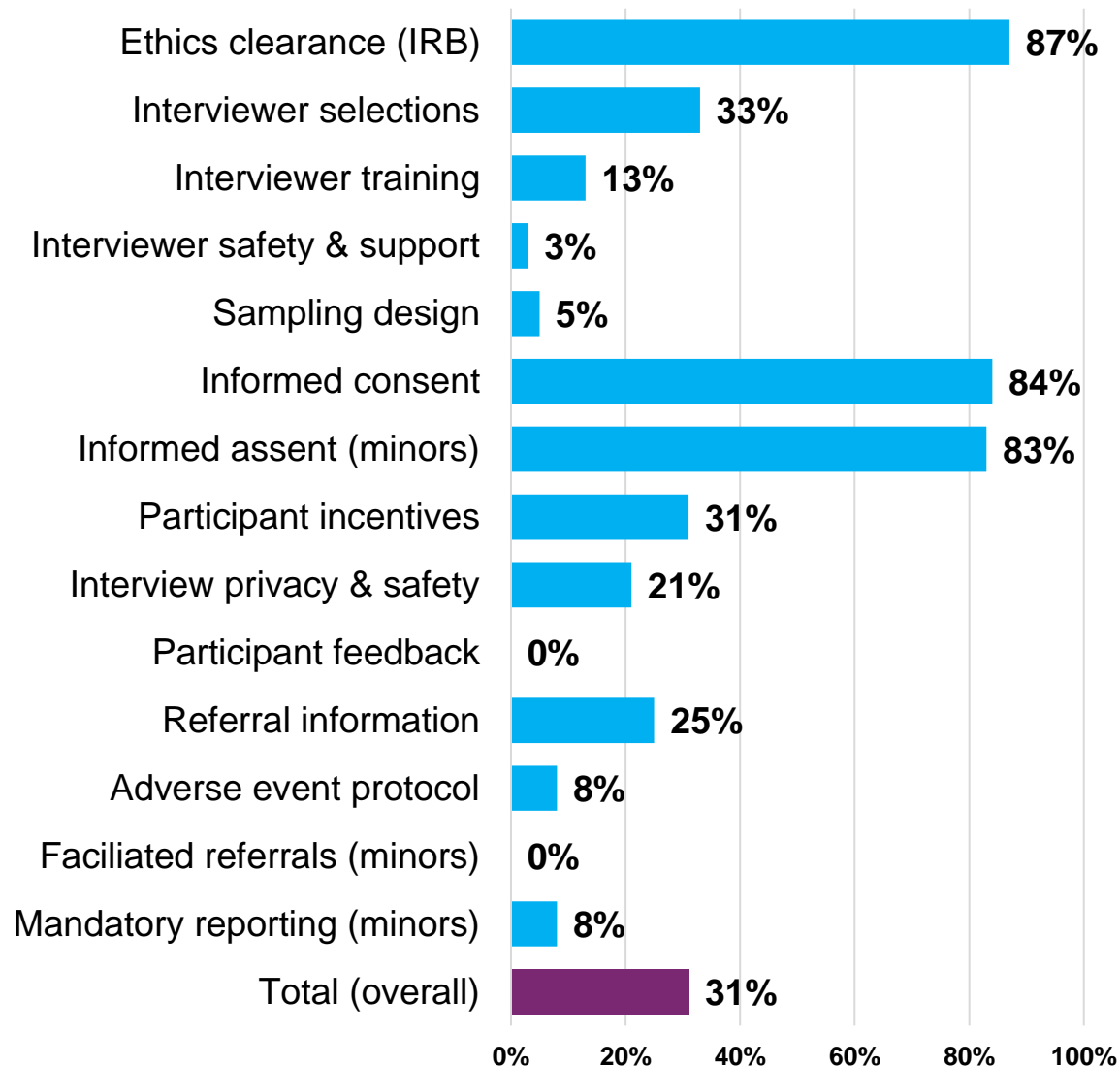
In a systematic review of studies collecting primary violence data during COVID-19 (n = 75)—what percentage of studies explained how they addressed mandatory reporting?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Question 6: Studies explaining how they addressed mandatory reporting?

- a) 8%
- b) 16%
- c) 28%
- d) 34%

Conclusion: Low accountability to research subjects, funders and other researchers.



Mandatory reporting: Considerations

- Ethical principles of protecting the “best interest of the child” apply to both research and legal policies on violence—yet they can appear contradictory
- Some countries have laws that protect against disclosure of confidential data collected from human subjects, including on violence against children
- Careful consideration is needed regarding legal frameworks, as well as how to integrate services and adverse event protocols which promote a do no harm approach into evaluation research
- Research teams must be backstopped by local experts with the ability to rapidly respond to adverse events – providing social services within the confines of participant consent (where possible)

Question 7: What share of studies published in economic journals were pre-registered?

- 1) Less than 20%
- 2) More than 50%
- 3) Just about 50 %
- 4) About 40%

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



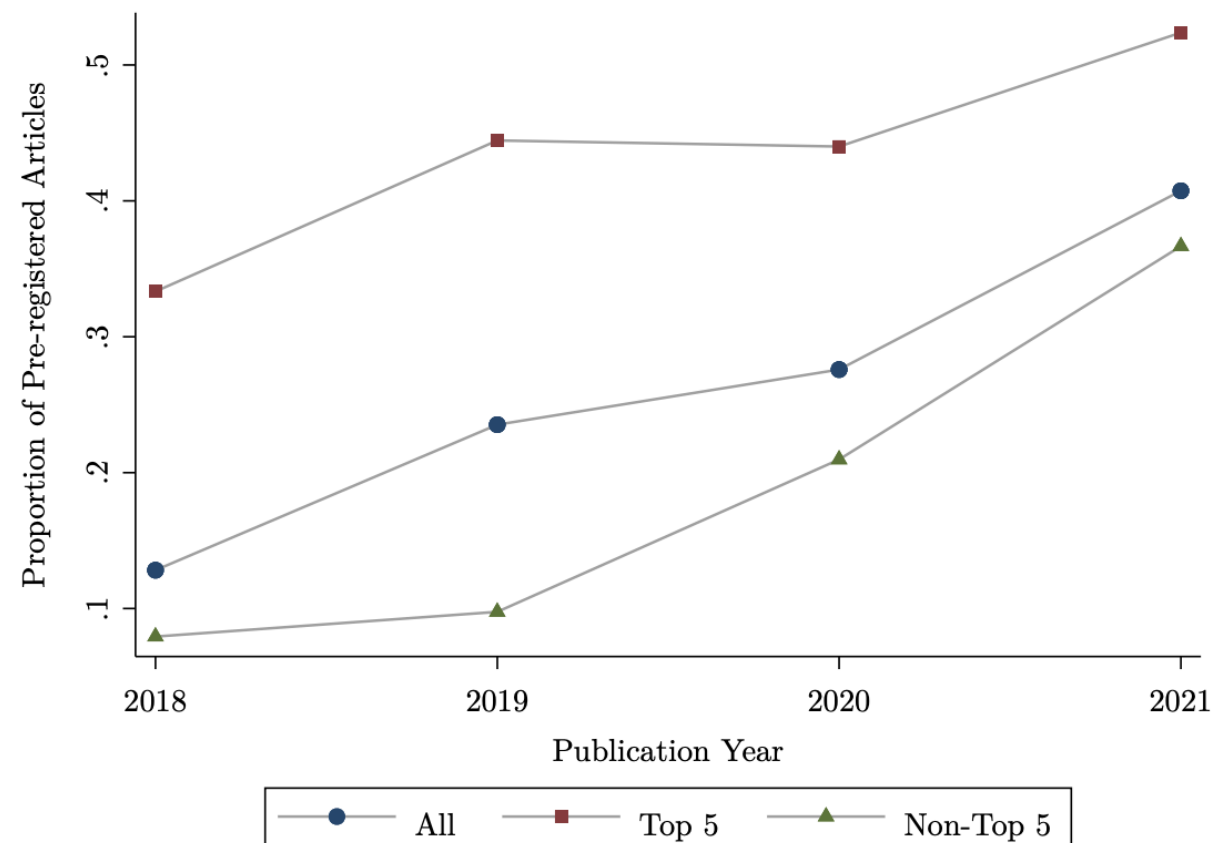
What share of studies published in economic journals were pre-registered?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Question 7: What share of studies published in economic journals were pre-registered?

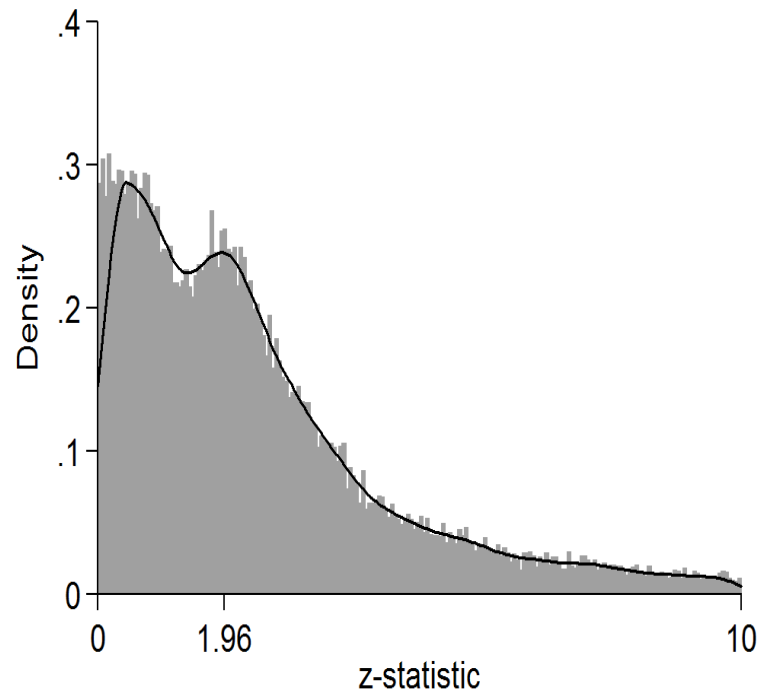
- 1) Less than 20%
- 2) More than 50%
- 3) Just about 50 %
- 4) **About 40%**

Figure 1: Pre-Registration Rates Over Time



Brodeur, et al. (2024)

Discontinuous dip at $p > .05$



[Brodeur et al \(2016\)](#)

File drawer problem or publication bias

- Studies that show positive results are often more likely to get published.
- Those with inconclusive, null, ambivalent, or otherwise uninteresting results have a higher chance of never getting reported or remaining unpublished, and as a result, records of their existence are lost.
- Leads to a biased interpretation of the (publicly) available evidence.
- This is a problem because policymakers use results from randomized impact evaluations to inform their decisions.
- Funders, donors and journals require registering the studies.

Research transparency

WHEELS OF CHANGE: IMPACT OF BICYCLES ON FEMALE EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN ZAMBIA

[VIEW TRIAL HISTORY >](#)

LAST REGISTERED ON SEPTEMBER 21, 2018

Pre-Trial

▼ Trial Information

GENERAL INFORMATION

Title
Wheels of change: Impact of bicycles on female education and empowerment in Zambia

RCT ID
AEARCTR-0003339

Initial registration date
September 20, 2018

Initial registration date is when the trial was registered. It corresponds to when the registration was submitted to the Registry to be reviewed for publication.

First published
September 21, 2018, 1:19 AM EDT

First published corresponds to when the trial was first made public on the Registry after being reviewed.

Last updated
September 21, 2018, 4:29 PM EDT

Last updated is the most recent time when changes to the trial's registration were published.

Information to register

- Title, country, keyword(s), abstract
- Current status of the trial, trial and intervention start and end dates
- Primary outcomes, experimental design, randomization method, randomization unit, clustering, sample size (total number, number of clusters, and units per treatment arm)
- IRB approval information.
- Pre-analysis plan (optional)

Question 8: What share of studies published in the top 50 economic journals were replications?

- 1) Less than 10%
- 2) Around 5%
- 3) Between 1 and 5%
- 4) Less than 1%

slido

Please download and install the Slido app on all computers you use



What share of studies published in the top 50 economic journals were replications?

① Start presenting to display the poll results on this slide.

Question 8: What share of studies published in the top 50 economic journals were replications?

- 1) Less than 10%
- 2) Around 5%
- 3) Between 1 and 5%
- 4) **Less than 1%**

Reproducibility

Replication is a central pillar of the scientific method

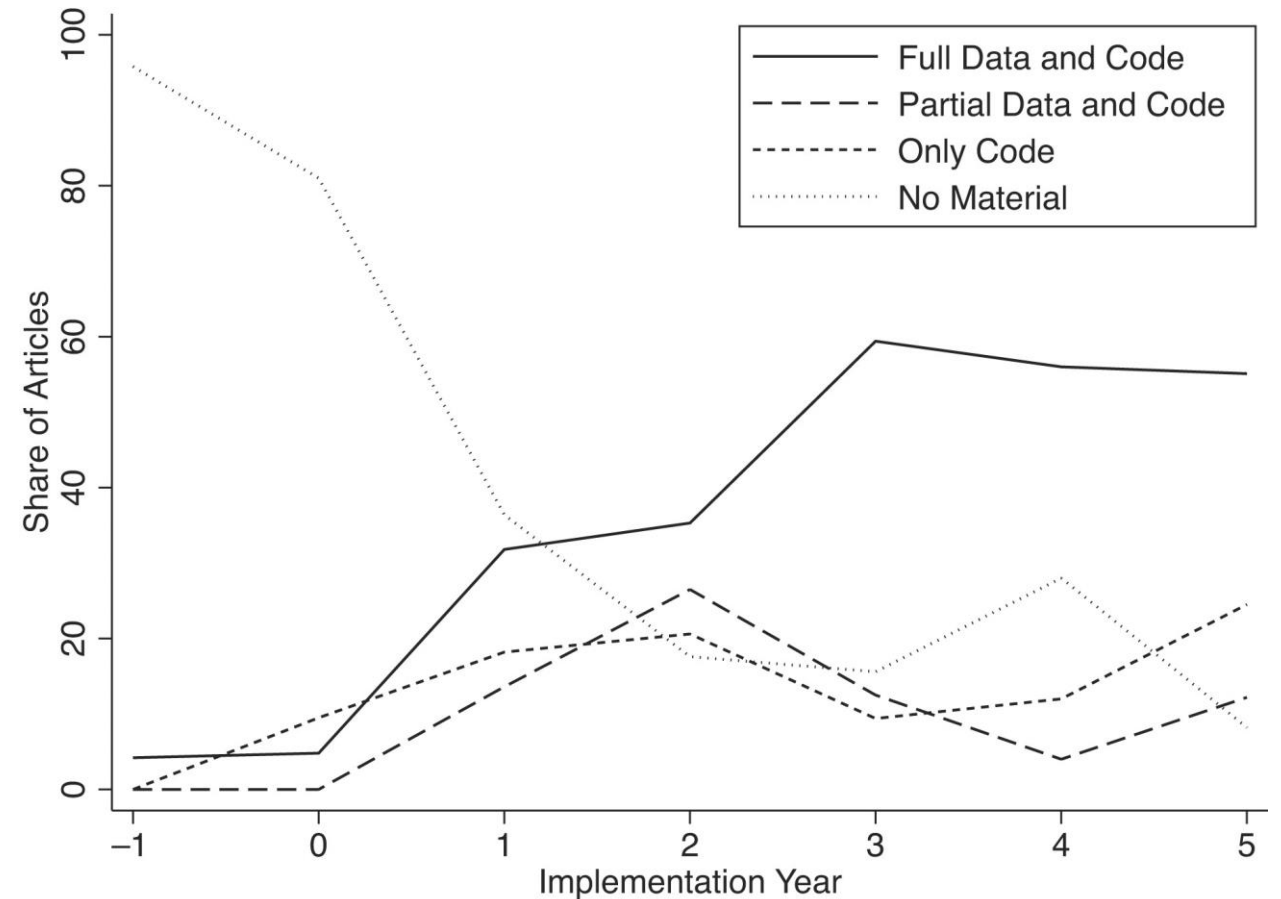
What are the main challenges to replicating results of evaluations in social sciences?

- Data access
- Terminology
- Standardised Processes



Reproducibility

- Most journals have policies that encourage/require data publication.
- The share of articles that publish data and codes has increased.
- However, less than 1% of papers published in the best journals of economics between 2010 and 2020 were replications.



Why publish research data?

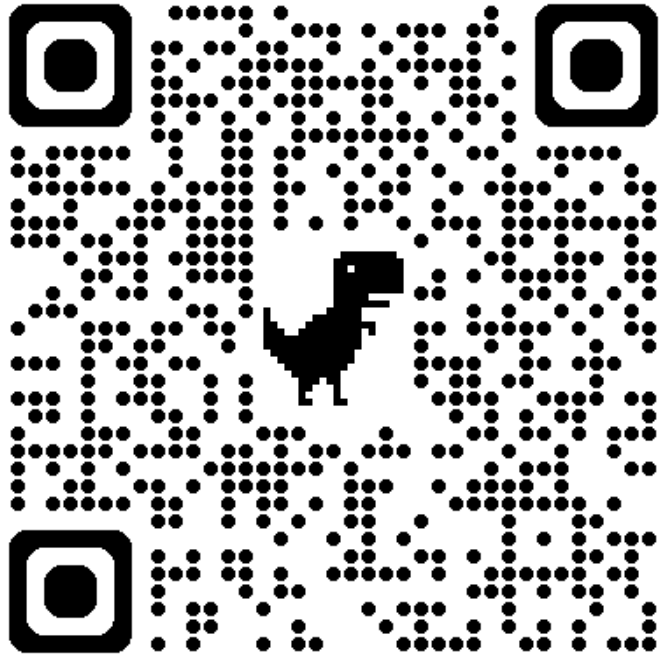
- Allowing for re-use of the data by researchers, policymakers, students, and teachers around the world.
- Creating insights based on multiple studies through meta-analyses, and answering questions on external validity and generalizability of results.
- Enabling the replication and confirmation of published results as well as sensitivity or complementary analyses.

Considerations

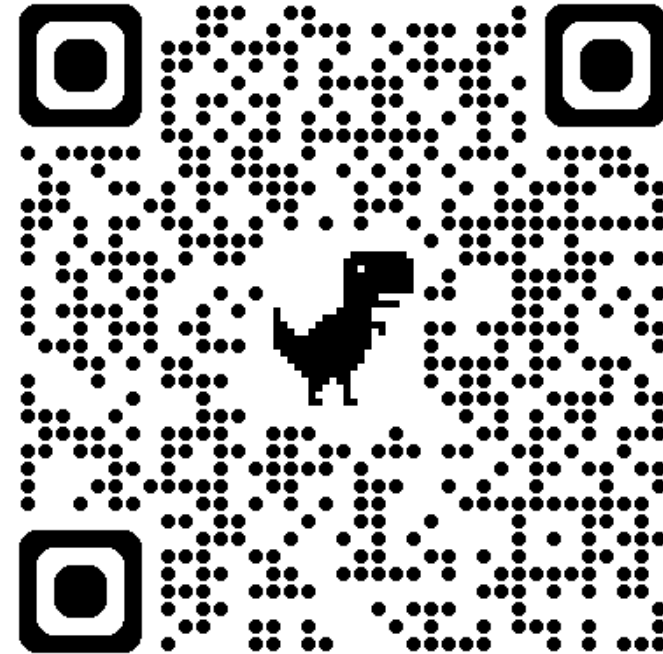
- Data ownership
- Information provided to study participants
- Information provided to IRB
- Data sensitivity
- Identifiable data
- Legal frameworks
- Donor or journals requirements

More resources from J-PAL

Data publication



Pre-registration





unicef 
for every child

IMP **ACT**

Global Impact
Evaluation Forum
2024 at the
United Nations

Thank you!

