

A Measuring Guide For Dignity

The concept of human dignity is fundamental to the mission of many development organizations, yet its systematic measurement within program monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has often been overlooked. This guide aims to bridge that gap by providing non-profit program staff and researchers with a comprehensive understanding of why and how to measure respect for dignity among program participants.

You can also use the [Dignity Measurement tool](#) to help you choose the right metric for you.

Defining Human Dignity and Respect for Dignity

A clear and operational definition of human dignity is paramount for its effective measurement. For the purposes of this guide, and drawing from established work in the field, human dignity is defined as below:

Defining Dignity

"Human dignity is the inherent value that every individual possesses equally by virtue of being a human being, independent of one's abilities, characteristics, or actions. Respect for human dignity is acknowledgement of that inherent value by individuals, institutions, and society." (Perrin et al, 2022)."

This inherent value cannot be earned nor can it be bestowed. It cannot be diminished or increased. **Respect for human dignity** is the acknowledgment of this inherent value by individuals, institutions, and society. A critical distinction for measurement is between dignity as an inherent, unchangeable quality and this experience of having one's dignity respected or violated.

This distinction makes the concept of dignity actionable for M&E. If dignity is inherent and equal, it cannot be increased or decreased by external factors. However, development programs, through their actions, processes, and the attitudes of their staff, can significantly influence whether participants feel their inherent worth is being acknowledged and respected. Consequently, measurement tools are designed to capture these manifestations of respect or disrespect such as perceptions of fair treatment, being listened to, feeling valued, experiencing non-humiliating interactions, etc.

Why Measuring Dignity Matters?

Many development and humanitarian organizations explicitly cite respect for human dignity as a central theme in their mission statements, vision documents, and guiding principles. However, a significant gap often exists between these stated commitments and their actual practices.

The introduction of systematic dignity measurement can serve as a powerful catalyst for organizational change. When organizations commit to measuring dignity, they are compelled to define what respectful treatment means within their specific program contexts and for the particular populations they serve. Regularly collected data on participants' experiences of dignity create feedback loops that can highlight these discrepancies between intended ideals and actual practice, thereby prompting necessary programmatic adjustments.

Over time, this iterative process can lead to dignity being embedded not just in aspirational statements but in the very fabric of program design, implementation, M&E frameworks, and overall organizational ethos. In this way, measuring dignity transcends being a mere assessment of participant experience. It becomes a strategic tool for organizational learning and transformation, guiding the sector towards more profoundly ethical and effective development practice.

Note that a common concern that arises in this discussion is the perceived dignity-efficiency tradeoff: the worry that prioritizing dignity might slow operations, increase costs, etc. Our response isn't to dismiss this concern, but to insist that organizations should measure both parts of this potential tradeoff. By doing so, organizations gain the crucial insights needed to understand the actual relationship between the two, identify potential synergies, and make informed decisions about how to optimize for both.

Existing Measures and Tools for Assessing Dignity

A growing number of tools and instruments have been developed to assess dignity or respect for dignity, though often tailored to specific contexts. While a universally accepted, single tool for measuring all aspects of human dignity remains elusive due to its complex and subjective nature, the available instruments offer valuable starting points for practitioners.

The following table provides a comparative overview of some prominent dignity measurement tools, which can help practitioners identify potentially suitable options for their specific needs.

Table: Key Dignity Measurement Tools

Tool Name	Primary Purpose or Focus	Format	Target Population	Known Validation - Region	Known Validation-Sector
Felt Respect for Dignity Scale	Measures subjective experience of felt respect in a specific recent interaction with a provider	5 items, Likert scale	Recipients of aid/services	US, Morocco, China	Healthcare, finance, policing contexts.
Project Respect for Participant Dignity Scale	Assesses extent to which project implementation respects participants' dignity	10 items, 5-point Likert scale	Project participants	Validated in 4 LMICs (India, Niger, Philippines, Zambia)	
Respect for Dignity in Daily Life Index	Assesses respect for dignity in participants' households, communities, institutions; participants' respect for others	24 items (4 subscales), 5-point Likert scale	Project participants, Indirect participants, Community members	Validated in 4 LMICs (India, Niger, Philippines, Zambia)	
Respect for Persons Index	Measures respect accorded to individuals/groups	7- point Likert scale. 10 items	Primarily participants in social psychology research		Focused on social psychology research
Human Dignity Index (HDI)	Measures the extent to which human dignity is upheld within an organization's workplace culture and operations	Staff assessment survey using rating scales	Employees/staff within an organization	Used internally by CRS and partners globally	
The Human Dignity Scale	Measures human dignity at the individual level and within social contexts like teams and organizations	24 point Likert Scale	Employees, Teams and Organizations	Validated in USA and online Mturk audience	Have mostly used in academic and organizational settings

<u>Dignity Index</u>	Measures dignity/contempt in political speech	Single item	Primarily political speech, adaptable to other discourse contexts	Piloted in Utah, USA	Political speech, Strategic management
<u>Patient Dignity Inventory (PDI)</u>	To identify and measure the specific sources of distress in patients	25 items(5 sub scales). 5 point Likert Scale	Individuals in palliative care and hospice settings.	Widely translated, tested and validated globally	Health
<u>ICU-RESPECT</u>	Assess the experience of respect from the perspective of patients and their families.	10 items. 4 point Likert Scale	Mostly used in critical care settings.	Tested in US and Netherlands	Health

Selecting the Right Dignity Measurement Approach and Tool

The selection of an appropriate dignity measurement tool or approach is a critical step that requires careful consideration of various factors. It is not a one-size-fits-all decision; rather it should be a deliberate process tailored to the specific objectives of the program/study, the target population, the cultural context, available resources, and overarching ethical considerations.

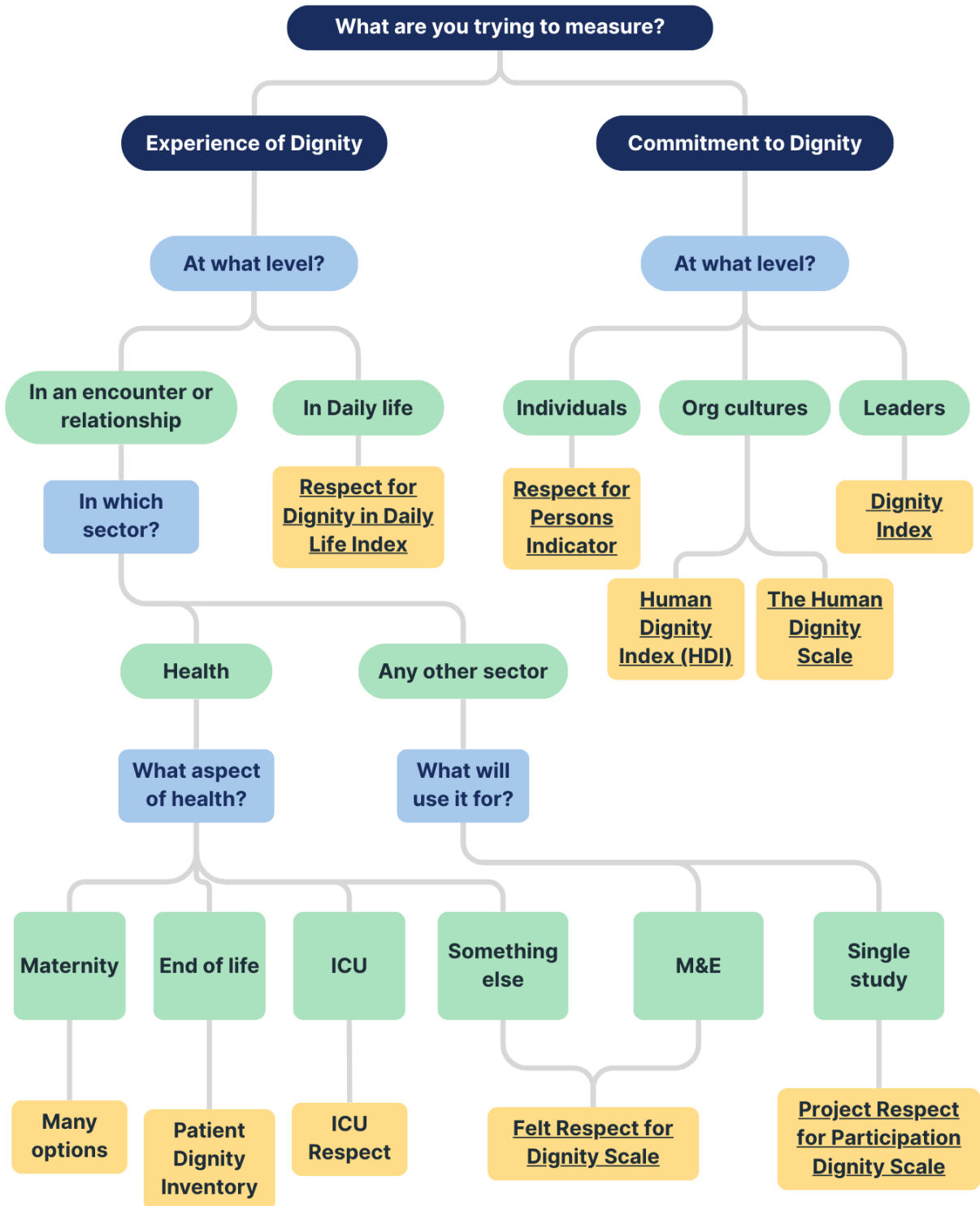
Listing below a few factors and key questions to consider while making this decision

- **Program Objectives & Theory of Change (ToC):**
 - Consider which specific aspects of dignity are most relevant to your program's goals, how dignity fits into your program's overall logic, what decisions the data will inform, etc.
- **Target Population & Context:**
 - Understand who you are collecting data from (demographics, vulnerabilities, literacy, language), the local cultural understanding of dignity, and whether any proposed tools have been validated in a similar setting.
- **Sector-Specific Considerations:**
 - Analyze how the program's operational sector (e.g., health, education, humanitarian aid) influences which dimensions of dignity are most critical, the typical interactions and power dynamics, existing sector standards, etc.

- **Desired Depth vs. Breadth of Information:**
 - Decide whether you need in-depth understanding from a few (qualitative focus) or trend data from many (quantitative focus), or if a mixed-methods approach is best
- **Frequency & Purpose of Measurement:**
 - Determine if the measurement is for one-off research, baseline/endline evaluation, or ongoing monitoring; how often data will be collected; and how the data will be used (internal learning, donor reporting, research, etc.)

Remember, this guidance is indicative. Your final decision should be informed by a thorough assessment against all the relevant factors and questions. And most often adaptation or piloting of tools selected might be necessary.

Measurement of DIGNITY



Analyzing and Interpreting Dignity Data

The analysis of dignity data should aim for a holistic understanding, often benefiting from a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

- **Quantitative Analysis:** For survey-based tools like the CRS scales or IDinsight's Felt Respect scale, quantitative analysis will typically involve calculating scores (e.g., mean scores, percentages of participants reporting high/moderate/low dignity). While a particular score or range can't be interpreted as a high dignity or low dignity score, we can analyze these scores in many other ways:
 - Statistical tests can be used to compare scores across different groups (by gender, age, location,etc.)
 - Track changes over time
 - Examine correlations with other program outcomes.
 - Analyzing responses to individual items can also pinpoint specific areas where dignity is well-respected or where challenges exist
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Data from interviews, focus groups, or open-ended survey questions should be analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, key insights, and illustrative narratives. This can provide depth and explanation for quantitative findings, revealing the "how" and "why" behind participants' experiences of dignity.

Participatory Analysis: Involving program participants, community representatives, or local staff in the process of interpreting the findings can significantly enhance the validity and relevance of the conclusions. Those with lived experience often bring unique insights that external researchers might miss. You can refer to our [participatory research methods](#) guide for more information on this.

Expectation Problem

What is it?

People's sense of what counts as "respectful treatment" isn't fixed. It often depends on their past experiences, social norms, cultural background, etc.

Why it matters?

Self-reports of dignity violations can understate the true need for dignity. Comparing scores across regions or populations can be misleading if each group is using a different internal standard.

How to address it?

1. Elicit baseline norms: Before asking about personal experiences, consider asking: "What would you consider the minimum level of respect someone should receive in this setting?"

2. Use finer-grained scales: Opt for a 7-point Likert or 0–100 slider to reduce ceiling/floor effects and capture subtle differences in expectation.
3. Anchor with vignettes: Present brief, concrete scenarios (e.g. “A nurse speaks curtly but completes treatment on time”) and ask respondents to rate their dignity impact. Use these anchors to calibrate across groups.
4. Control for known drivers: Collect data on prior exposure to disrespect and other relevant factors that might impact their expectations. Adjust analyses to isolate genuine differences in treatment from differences in expectation.
5. Be inclusive of marginalized groups: Consider examining the experiences of marginalized groups separately to understand factors affecting their expectations and its impact

Continue your journey and get in touch

Measurement is just one part of the journey. As you learn and discuss your results, consider using our other tools, such as our database of evidenced solutions you might implement if you detect a problem with your dignity performance.

We should all be sharing examples of how these tools are being used, and where they are being validated. If you have done work to measure dignity, or you have something to add, please let us know by writing to dignity@idinsight.org.

Key Readings

- [Measuring 'felt respect' for Dignity in service interactions: a new five-item survey measure performs well in three countries and three contexts- Dignity Initiative, 2022 \(Working Paper\)](#)
- [Measuring Respect for Human Dignity among Project Participants- Catholic Relief Services, 2024 -\(Toolkit\)](#)
- [Unconditional respect for persons: A social psychological analysis - Mansur Lalljee et al.,2007\) \(Paper\)](#)
- [Establishing a Dignity Scale - Measuring Intrinsic Value within Social Contexts - \(Michael Pirson et al.,2023\) \(Paper\)](#)
- [The Dignity Index - Utah Pilot Project Technical Summary \(Report\)](#)
- [The Patient Dignity Inventory: A Novel Way of Measuring Dignity-Related Distress in Palliative Care - \(Harvey Max Chochinov et al.,2008\) \(Paper\)](#)
- [ICU-RESPECT: An index to assess patient and family experiences of respect in the intensive care unit - \(Gail Geller et al.,2016\) \(Paper\)](#)
- [The Science of Dignity: Measuring Personhood and Well-Being in the United States - Steven Hitlin, Matthew A. Andersson, 2023 \(Book\)](#)