

An International Survey of Assent Practices Used by Educational Researchers

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SUMMARY

Consent — Informed parental consent is an ethical requirement for research involving child participants.

Consent vs. Assent — When participants cannot provide consent themselves, researchers seek assent in addition to parental consent. Consent is a formal, legal agreement given by parents for children, while assent is a child's agreement to participate.

Exploring Assent Practices — As part of this study, a sample of international Early Childhood Development (ECD) researchers from pediatrics, psychology, education, and applied behavior analysis completed an anonymous survey to explore expert views on child assent in various research settings. The survey focused on their experiences and challenges in obtaining meaningful assent from children.

OBJECTIVES

Establish key knowledge and best practices around assent in early childhood research fields. Our specific objectives were:

- ✓ Describe the level of knowledge about consent and assent requirements among ECD researchers.
- ✓ Determine ECD researchers' practices and resources for developing procedures and overcoming barriers to seek meaningful assent.

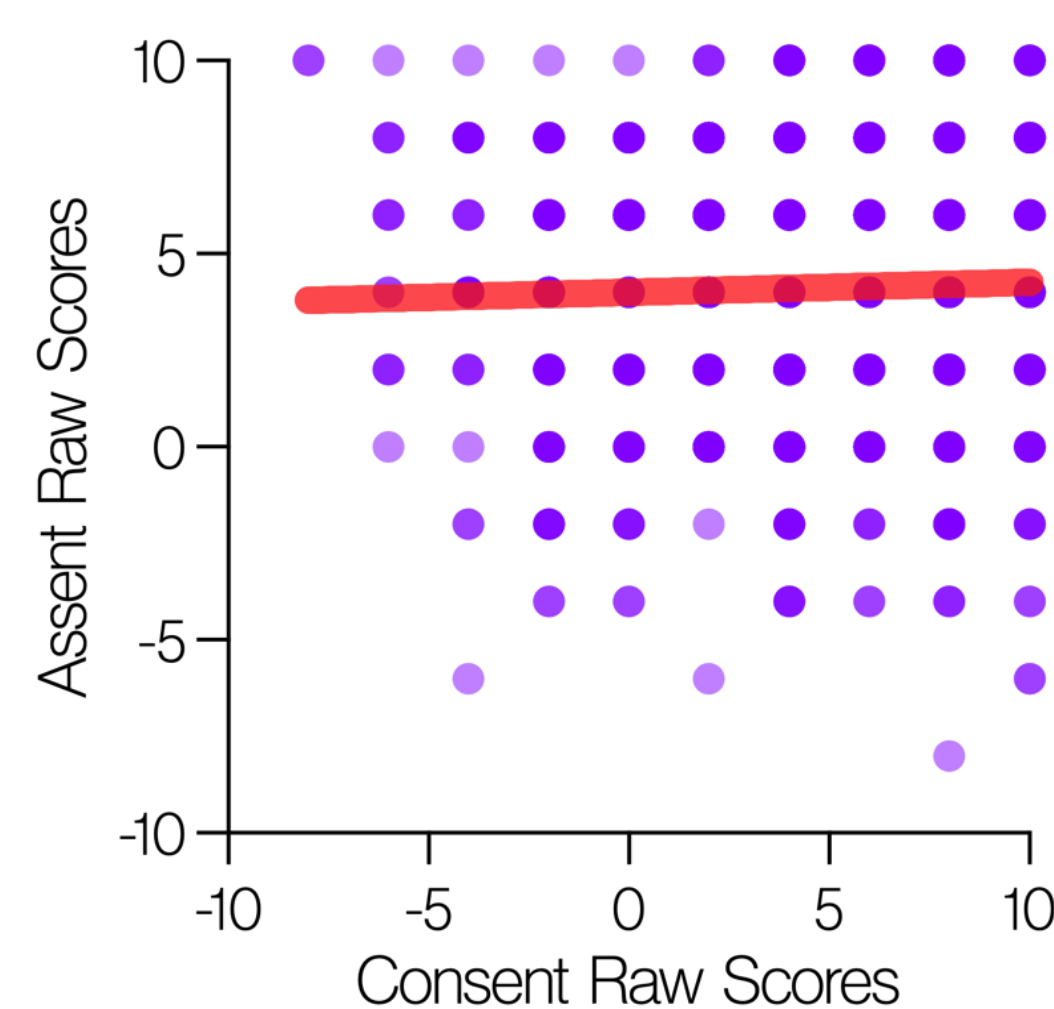
METHODS

We obtained an extensive contact database from publicly-available corresponding author details as published in ECD journal articles.

The key areas explored included variations in assent practices, resources used to develop protocols, and considerations for specific participant demographics.

Of the 1524 researchers that accessed the survey, 1437 (94.3%) consented to participate, and 731 (48.0%) provided complete responses.

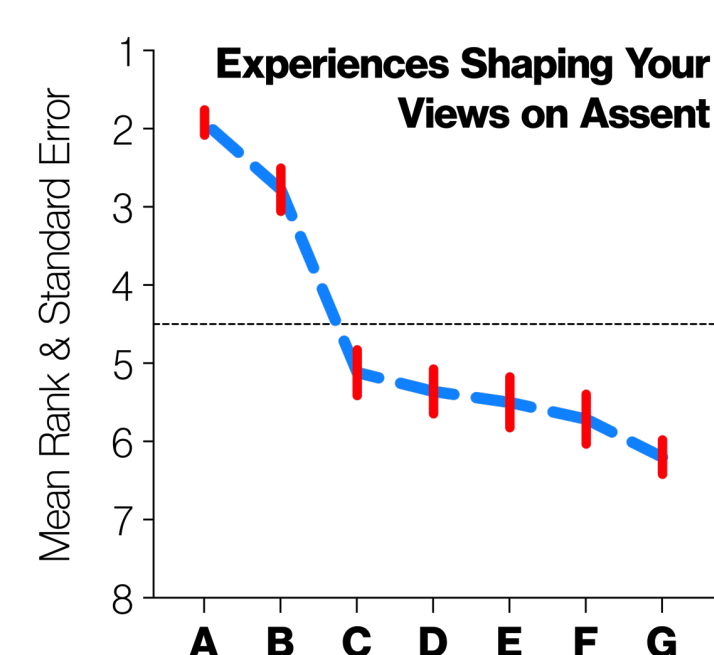
In the interest of brevity, the current analysis focuses only on survey responses from researchers in the field of education.



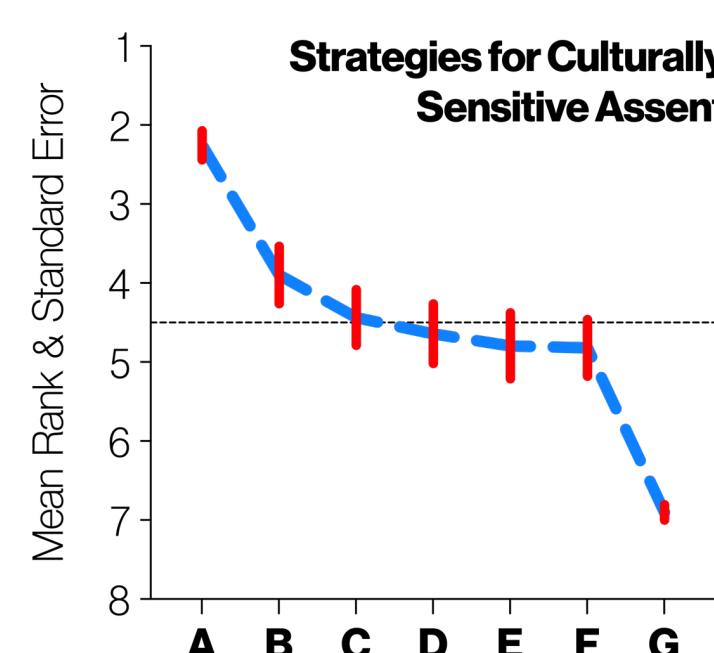
Understanding of Consent Does Not Guarantee Understanding of Assent — We presented researchers with a test to gauge their understanding of assent and consent. The scatter plot denotes no correlation between the two domains. Dot saturation is proportional to the frequency of intersecting assent and consent scores. Linear regression highlighted in red.

RESULTS

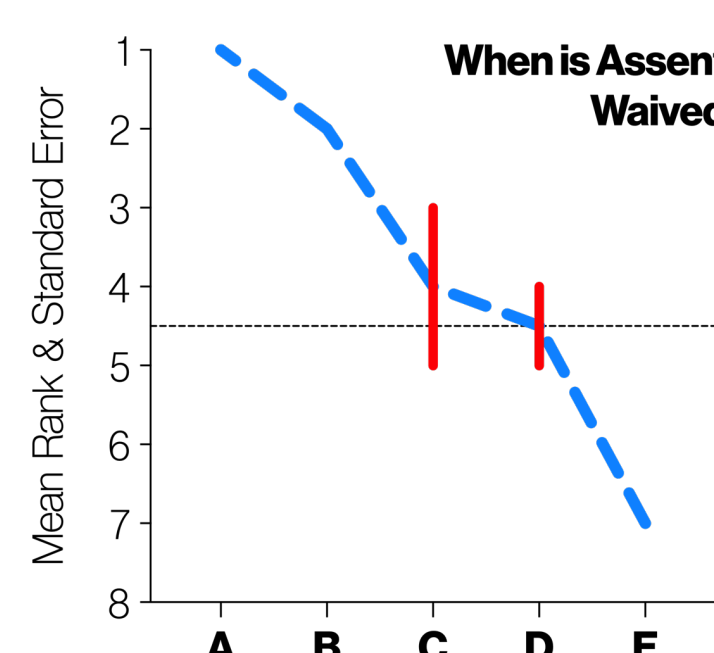
- ✓ Education researchers had a moderate understanding of assent, as measured by an *ad hoc* test with assent and consent subdomains.
- ✓ Assent is primarily self-taught or learned through mentorship, with few researchers reporting any formal training.
- ✓ Researchers use few culturally sensitive assent-seeking strategies beyond using the participant's native language.
- ✓ Parental consent and lack of 'apparent' capacity where the most common rationales for waiving assent.
- ✓ Rephrasing and repeating assent prompts was the most common strategy to 'prevent' guiding an affirmative assent response.



- A. Self-taught using literature and guidelines
- B. Mentorship from others
- C. Self-taught, no formal sources
- D. Other educational activity
- E. Workshop with practice
- F. Other (idiosyncratic)
- G. Workshop w/o practice



- A. Assent prompt in native language
- B. Parental consent to the assent protocol.
- C. Consult with families & advocacy groups
- D. Input from recruitment agents (eg, principals)
- E. IRB appointed w diversity & equity principles
- F. Parents present throughout the activity
- G. Other (idiosyncratic)



- A. Assent capacity severely limited
- B. Informed consent available
- C. Intervention beneficial; assent irrelevant
- D. Third party recommends against seeking assent
- E. Other (idiosyncratic)



Ranking of Assent Practices and Experiences — The graphs on the left present the mean rank resulting from the input of hundreds of education and social science researchers. For ease of interpretation, items have been rank-ordered with relatively higher ranks presented on the left of the graphs.

DISCUSSION

- ✓ Gaps in knowledge were evident in both assent and consent.
- ✓ Most researchers had no formal training on ethical assent processes.
- ✓ Researchers seem to engage in few culturally sensitive assent practices.
- ✓ Researchers often guide an affirmative assent response or consider parental consent a valid rationale for waiving assent.

