TALKING ACROSS DISCIPLINES: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES, RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION (TraFaDy WG5)

KEY INSIGHTS AND TAKEAWAYS

Methodological choices in studying transnational families actively shape what becomes visible about family life

Combining methods captures a fuller picture of TNF life's complexity

Better data is needed, especially beyond the Global North

Through four years of systematic work across quantitative, mixed-methods, and qualitative approaches, WG5 deepens methodological reflection on the particular challenges of studying transnational family dynamics. Beyond this academic reflection, these methodological insights also strengthen the applicability of TraFaDy's findings for stakeholders outside academia, aligning research with policy and practice improvements across diverse contexts. Efforts within TraFaDy WG5 to tackle methodological challenges in studying transnational family dynamics research have fostered collaborations between disciplines and stakeholders beyond academia. By bringing together diverse expertise and perspectives, integrating qualitative methods, and expanding quantitative and mixed-methods research, we achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of transnational family life. This initiative promotes stakeholder engagement and aligns research with policy and practice improvements, driving impactful outcomes across diverse contexts.

CLICK HERE

Advancing knowledge on transnational family life requires innovative approaches with real heuristic and epistemic potential, sustained by reflexivity and positionality

The Qualitative Research Subgroup's key methodological contribution was initiating critical discussions about methodological approaches in transnational family research: from sharing experiences with particular research methods (e.g. biographic, ethnographic, longitudinal, multi-sited, arts-based, mixed-methods) to deeper methodological, ethical, and epistemic dimensions. Given the ontological specifics of the research phenomena, particular focus was dedicated to critical reflections on research with interpreters, ethical concerns, participatory approaches, and reconceptualization of reflexivity and positionality – not regarded as ethical formalities but seen as integral dimensions of qualitative inquiry that actively shape what becomes visible in transnational family research. This emerged in response to recurring methodological challenges, including power asymmetries among researchers and participants; the challenge of comparing research across countries; the dilemmas of context-specific positionalities of the researchers; and the ethical dilemmas of researching families in precarious circumstances which require particular caution in method design given their vulnerability.

- Critical reflection requires recognizing that research methods function not only as tools but also as practices that influence the visibility and interpretation of family life.
- Drawing on a combination of research methods can contribute to a fuller understanding of the diversity of transnational family life across contexts.
- Reflexivity and positionality are essential components of the research process, demonstrating the quality and depth of findings and interpretations, not as an add-on, but as what makes their use rigorous.
- Knowledge production on transnational families is an active process that involves not only research participants and researchers, but also interpreters and co-researchers. This process is also marked by power asymmetries – over who has the legitimacy to define what counts as knowledge, and who has a voice in its interpretation. Such asymmetries require particular caution and reflexivity concerning epistemic justice in knowledge production.
- Participatory approaches advance epistemic justice in knowledge production on transnational family life by fostering more rigorous, transparent, and ethically grounded research, building trust with families experiencing legal and political insecurity, and generating evidence relevant to migration and family rights policy.
- All research participants should be provided with the necessary resources, recognition, and training, as reflected in ethics procedures.

Critical reflection on methodologies in transnational family research, given its diversity and ontological specifics, is essential

CLICK HERE

Greater integration of qualitative and quantitative methods is essential if the field is to 'come of age' methodologically

The mixed-methods subgroup brought together transnational families researchers from diverse disciplines to advance mixed-methods TNF research. We identified barriers to mixed-methods TNF research as differing epistemological traditions, the need for multiple methodological skill sets, challenges of multi-sited research, difficulties accessing TNF populations and complex ethical considerations. We then identified two core opportunities for expanding the use of mixed methods designs in TNF research:

- Mixed-methods approaches remain underutilised in Transnational Families (TNF) research. Diversifying Data and Methods: Whilst existing mixed methods TNF research uses fieldwork heavy methods & analysis is often narrow, there are exciting and pragmatic opportunities around legal methods & policy analysis, biographical methods and secondary quantitative data.
- Expanding Collaborative Research Practice: We need to focus on interactions between researchers which create synergistic outcomes, particularly through embedding inclusive authorship and ownership, forging partnerships out of the academy and creating the time and space to explore synergies together.

The strong interdisciplinarity of TNF research places the field in an excellent position to embrace mixed-methods innovations

CLICK HERE

The diversity of data sources and approaches used in quantitative studies provide valuable complementary insights on transnational families' lives to qualitative research

The starting point for **the Quantitative Methods Subgroup's** work is that quantitative research remains under-represented in the transnational families' literature. The general objective was therefore to take stock of existing research, explore the possibilities and limitations of available data sources, and work towards new data collections. The scoping review of existing quantitative studies carried out by team members mapped the diversity of data sources and topics covered, while new research collaborations examined families' residential arrangements, migration patterns, and aspirations and intentions. Given the centrality of reliable and relevant data to quantitative research, members have also made efforts to improve data collection, including participation in discussions in both formal and informal settings, as well as a proposal for a data module within an existing survey collection which, although not accepted, reflects the group's commitment to advancing data infrastructure in this field in the future.

- While qualitative research provides rich accounts of transnational families' lives and experiences, quantitative studies often rely on rough measures of family relationships at a distance (contact frequencies, visits, remittances), especially when using secondary data. Adapting measures developed in quantitative family research (intergenerational solidarity, personal closeness, and relationship quality) to transnational families' experiences could allow these aspects to be explored with greater nuance.
- Quantitative studies focusing specifically on "transnational families" often concentrate on specific dyads (spouses, parent-child, adult child-parent) and qualify them as "transnational" when family members reside in different countries. However, these family situations are also designated using other terms and analysed using alternative data sources when focusing on other topics. More interdisciplinary discussions and collaborations would enrich our understanding of these families' experiences and help 'mainstream' the topic of transnational families into other areas, facilitating new data collection.
- Although existing quantitative studies span multiple origin and destination contexts (Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America), datasets collected in destination contexts in the Global North constitute the majority, thus limiting the knowledge produced on these families. Integrating data from the Global South through existing datasets, as well as new origin or multi-sited data collections, would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of transnational families globally.

Integration with quantitative family and migration research would strengthen the methodological toolkit and improve data collection on TNF

Edited by: Jelena Predojević-Despić
Authored by: Martina Wilsch, Esra Demirkol Colosio, Jelena Predojević-Despić, Rachel Bennett, Tatiana Eremenko
Contributors: Anila Sulaj, David Schiefer

Predojevic-Despic, J., Wilsch, M., Demirkol Colosio, E., Bennett, R., Eremenko, T., Sulaj, A., & Schiefer, D. (2026). Talking across disciplines: methodological issues, research and data collection (TRAFADY WG5) – key insights and takeaways.
COST Action CA21143 – TraFaDy c/o Odisee University of Applied Sciences, Brussels, Belgium.
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23436122