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I & others have pointed to errors/misrepresentations in the report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Diversities. To be fair, there is plenty of good or uncontentious stuff.

But leaving aside the specific empirical analysis, a short thread on the conceptual framework. (1/7)

The key point (as many have noted) is their very clear statement that if you can explain disparities with respect to factors other than race, then race is not a factor. (2/7)

The Commission therefore proposes the following framework to distinguish between different forms of racial disparity and racism:

1. Explained racial disparities: this term should be used when there are persistent ethnic differential outcomes that can demonstrably be shown to be as a result of other factors such as geography, class or sex.

In other words, if your empirical analysis shows that controlling for occupation, black people are no more likely to die of covid-19 then you've "explained" the disparity in covid death rates and race isn't a factor.

But this is wrong. Structural inequality is a complex interplay of causes & outcomes: & one variable can be both at once. Sticking a bunch of variables on one side of a regression and claiming you've "explained" away racism (or sexism, or poverty) is not credible analysis. (4/7)

And this risks circularity. Low income is a significant predictor of poor health. Poor health is a significant predictor of low income. It would be wrong to conclude that because black people have lower incomes & worse health, they are causing each other & race is irrelevant!

This does *not* mean racism drives everything. What it does mean is that if you want to understand racial (or other) disparities you need to unpick them, and think about what is driving what – not try to "explain" them away. (6/7)

We *do* need a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between race, class & many other factors if we want to address unfair and damaging disparities - call it intersectionality!

The report, sadly, is simplistic and reductive. A missed opportunity.

ENDS

(7/7)

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