Why data on sex matters for policy

**Data on sex matters:** We need accurate data, disaggregated by sex in order to understand differences in the lives of women and men, and in order to tackle sexism. Sex matters from the start of life, as illustrated by international differences in the sex ratio at birth due to son preference in countries such as China and India. Sex is a powerful predictor of almost every dimension of social life: education, the labour market, political attitudes and behaviour, religion, crime, physical health, mental health, cultural tastes and consumption – the list goes on. It is difficult to think of an area of life where sex is not an important dimension for analysis. Women have historically been second class citizens when it comes to data (see Caroline Criado Perez (2019) *Invisible Women),* but, until recently, government agencies have acknowledged the importance of gathering data on sex.

**Sex vs gender identity:** Agencies are increasingly moving away from recording sex in favour of recording gender identity where this is at odds with an individual’s sex. This leads to error and bias. Sex and gender identity are entirely distinct concepts – sex is biological, whereas gender identity is typically understood in opposition to sex, and refers to how one perceives oneself. In contexts where data on gender identity is desired, this could usefully be recorded in addition to sex.

*Census 2021:*  The census authorities are currently planning guidance for the 2021 census which instructs respondents to answer in terms of their identity rather than their sex (Sullivan 2020). It may be assumed that, since the number of respondents who self-identify as members of the opposite sex will be small, the resulting measurement error will therefore be inconsequential. However, we currently have no reliable data on the size of the trans population either in the population as a whole or within sub-groups, and crucially, it is impossible to predict how this may change over time. It is unlikely that the trans population will be evenly distributed, for example by age, sex and geography. This means that the effects on data reliability are likely to be greater at the sub-group level. This can have extreme consequences for particular subgroups, e.g. 1 in 50 male prisoners in England and Wales identify as transgender (HM Inspectorate of Prisons 2019). The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust claims that between 1.2% and 2.7% of children and young people are ‘gender-diverse’(NIHR 2019).

*Employment and pay*: ACAS now advise that data on employee pay should be categorized by gender identity, and that data on ‘non-binary’ people can be excluded. At the level of the firm, these practices are likely to lead to severe biases, and could even be deliberately used to reduce the apparent pay gap between the sexes.

*Crime*: Police forces are recording crimes committed by men as though they were committed by women at the request of the perpetrator. The potential distorting effect on figures for violent and sexual crime is evident given that levels of female violent and sexual offending are extremely low.

*Health:* The replacement of actual sex with the desired sex on medical records at the patients request has implications for research using administrative health data. Clearly biology (rather than identity) is a major risk factor in many health conditions, and affects mortality.

**Policy capture and silencing**: The proposed introduction of gender self-id in law has been dropped by the government in England and Wales, and is still under consideration in Scotland. Yet the principles behind the proposed changes have already been accepted by many public bodies, and this is already reflected in data collection.

Gender identity lobbyists have campaigned for many years to remove sex as a protected characteristic in law. Much of this campaigning has been done quietly, behind the scenes, within social and political institutions and organisations, without public debate, due process or democratic scrutiny, a process termed ‘policy capture’ (Murray and Hunter Blackburn 2019).

The question of sex and gender identity is marked by exceptional intolerance of dissent by genderist extremists, and a remarkably successful campaign to shut down debate. Academics face campaigns of vexatious complaints, no-platforming, and even threats of violence simply for asserting the reality and social salience of sex, especially when they do so from a feminist perspective (Sullivan and Suissa 2019). This has a wider chilling effect, meaning that normal open and rigorous discourse is effectively suspended. Critical voices are no longer heard, and so a false ‘consensus’ emerges. This is deeply unhealthy for both analysis and policy-making.

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