

The draft guidance is indicating that the sex question may be answered according to subjective gender identity. This raises issues about the measurement of sex and gender identity which other data collection exercises are also contending with.

I am appalled by the lack of scientific integrity displayed by this guidance which advocates gathering data on gender identity twice while abandoning data gathering by sex. The workshop I attended in Edinburgh made clear that sociologists, policy maker, scientists and service and health providers need data on sex. I am adamant that biological/birth sex must be captured in data gathering. The evidences for this need are overwhelming.

I attach 3 documents that outline why gender identity (a term NOT defined in law and that has become so wide that it encompasses cross dressing or a simple feeling) and sex (a clear, material, well defined fact with multiple social and medical consequences) must not be conflated. I also attach a couple of documents that highlight how the recognition of sex is being erased in law and policy making and how it will disproportionately impact women.

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 (Chao et al., 2019). Sex is a powerful predictor of almost every dimension of social life: education (Stoet et al., 2016), the labour market (Joshi et al., 2019), political attitudes and behaviour (Green & Prosser, 2018), religion (Voas, 2015), crime (Ministry of Justice, 2017), physical health (Koblinsky et al., 2018), mental health (Ploubidis et al., 2017), cultural tastes and consumption (Sullivan & Brown, 2015) – 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 (Perez, 2019), and a ‘male as norm’ attitude was still apparent in much quantitative social science as recently as the 1980s. Nevertheless, few quantitative social scientists today would question the central place of sex as an analytic category. So, why are some surveys moving away from asking about or observing sex?

I sincerely hope that scientific integrity prevails.

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