

GENDER CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGIES

SEX AND GENDER

SEX refers to biologically-defined characteristics that generally define humans as male or female. These are mainly based on genetics, anatomy, physiology and reproductive capabilities. It is universal, natural (people are born with it), a-historic and mostly unchanging, without medical treatment and/or surgery.

GENDER refers to socially constructed set of roles and responsibilities associated with being girl and boy or women and men, and in some cultures a third or other gender. It includes the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities, associated with certain groups of people with reference to their sex and sexuality.

Learned over time as a result of social conditioning processes, gender roles vary greatly in different societies, cultures and historical periods. They also depend on socio-economic factors, age, education, ethnicity and religion. Although deeply rooted, gender roles can be changed over time, since social values and norms are not static.

EXAMPLES:

Only women can give birth and breastfeed. This is a sex-related difference. On the other hand, the expectation of men to be economic providers of the family and for women to be caregivers is a gender norm, which, although prevalent in many cultures, proves to be non-universal.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- > At birth, the difference in the biological characteristics between boys and girls is their sex. These biological characteristics, however, are not mutually exclusive and there are individuals who possess both male and female characteristics.
- > As people grow up, society gives them different roles, attributes, opportunities, privileges and rights that, in the end, create the social differences between men and women.
- > Sexual orientation, while generally referring to one's sexual or romantic attractions, also includes sexual identity, sexual behaviours and sexual desires.

TRANSGENDER AND INTERSECTIONALITY

TRANSGENDER is an umbrella term referring to individuals who do not identify with the sex category assigned to them at birth or whose identity or behaviour falls outside of stereotypical gender norms.

INTERSEX refers to biological variation in sex characteristics, including chromosomes, gonads and/or genitals that do not allow an individual to be distinctly identified as female/male at birth. These include lesbian, gay, bisexual, pan sexual and transsexual persons.

TRANSEXUAL refers to people who identify entirely with the gender role opposite to the sex assigned to at birth and seek to live permanently in the preferred gender role. Transsexual people might intend to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone gender reassignment treatment (which may or may not involve hormone therapy or surgery).

INTERSECTIONALITY moves beyond the traditional notion of binary genders – men and women – and looks at other forms of social discrimination that combine, overlap, or intersect with existing gender discrimination. Intersectionality recognizes that identity markers (e.g. “female” and “differently-abled”) do not exist independently of each other, and that each informs the others, often creating a complex convergence of oppression. Using the intersectionality framework means recognizing that a person or group of persons are affected by a number of discriminations and are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, caste, tribe, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers.

EXAMPLES:

Simply speaking, this means that the discrimination faced by a differently-abled female cannot be dissected based on her ability and gender but that the two-types of discriminations not only add up but also increase putting the person at a greater disadvantage. Another example on intersectionality can be looking at how same-sex female couples are legally entitled to both adoption and insemination, while often only adoption is available to their male counterparts.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- > All surveys/questionnaires should include a third gender option besides woman/man (for example 'other/none,' 'other gender identity' or 'other gender').
- > Also ask yourself which other background variables might be relevant (for example age, race, area of residence, ethnicity, ability).
- > While getting data for analysis from other agencies especially the government, insist on data disaggregated not only by sex but also by other gender and social variables.

GENDER CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGIES

GENDER STEREOTYPES AND BIAS

GENDER STEREOTYPED are ideas that people have on masculinity and femininity: what men and women of all generations should be like and are capable of doing.

GENDER BIAS is the tendency to make decisions or take actions based on preconceived notions of capability according to gender. It also often refers to the prejudice of accepting the "Male Norm" as the standard for analysis and decision-making.

EXAMPLES:

Girls should be obedient and cute, are allowed to cry; boys are expected to be brave and not cry; women and girls are better caregivers and men or boys are better at mathematics. The related bias is that women are preferred for nursing jobs while men are given preference for engineering jobs. Another example of a bias is that public transport is needed mainly for people to go to work; thus, all planning is done keeping this in mind. However, while this is important for both men and women, this has a "male norm" bias as men use public transport more for travel to work only while women need public transport for work as well as other activities.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- > Undertake a detailed gender analysis of the sector/issue before designing any project or programme.
- > Map out the basic needs of men, women and other genders, in context to the problem that they face and not on how the accepted solution can be tweaked to meet the needs of all genders.

HETEROSEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA

HETEROSEXISM is the presumption that everyone is heterosexual and/or the belief that heterosexual people are naturally superior to homosexual and bisexual people. It is based on the idea that romantic and/or sexual relationships and feelings between a man and a woman is acceptable, and that all other relationships or feelings are unacceptable or outside the "norm."

HOMOPHOBIA is the irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behaviour or cultures. Homophobia also refers to self-loathing by homosexuals, as well as the fear of men or women who do not live up to society's standards of what it is to be a "true man" or "true woman."

EXAMPLES:

Heterosexist name calling – "gay" used in a negative way (e.g., "that's so gay") at school and offices. Having separate and dedicated public toilet facilities for men and women, with no clarity on the utility preferences of transgender persons. Similar is the case with shelter facilities during disasters. Lesbian and bisexual women are more unlikely to have a cervical smear test, compared with women in general. Homophobia includes hate crimes due to sexual orientation of the victim, but also the high level of domestic abuse faced by gay and bisexual persons.

PRACTICAL POINTS:

- > Identify the transgender population within your communities and support them to come forward.
- > Create support groups especially for access to education, health care and during disaster relief activities.

Source: Adapted from jhpiego (n.d.); Chauhan (2017); Ramšak (2017).