

Statistical Standard for Sex

Rationale

Sex is a fundamental variable for determining the demographic characteristics of a population for statistical, policy, and research purposes, both in New Zealand and internationally. It is frequently used in cross-tabulations across a wide range of topics resulting in comparisons of social outcomes for men and women and in the monitoring of progress towards social equity goals. Sex information, along with age, is used to produce national and sub-national population estimates and projections, as well as sex-specific demographic indicators such as life expectancy and fertility rates. They also provide the base population for many derived series, for example in areas such as morbidity, accident, and crime statistics. Sex data is fundamental in all administrative collections and surveys, and greatly assists international comparability.

Definition

Sex is the distinction between males and females based on the biological differences in sexual characteristics.

Explanatory notes

Sex reassignment or assignment

In responding to a question on sex, most people are able to classify themselves as either male or female. A person who has undergone sex reassignment should be classified to that sex. A person who was of indeterminate sex and who has undergone sex assignment should be classified to that sex. Someone who is currently undergoing such procedures and living as the sex that they are taking steps towards would be classified as that sex.

Gender

Although the term gender is commonly substituted for the term sex they are not interchangeable, as they are different concepts. Whereas sex is a biologically determined variable, gender refers to the socially and culturally perceived or expected dimensions of behaviour associated with males and females, that is masculinity and femininity respectively. Gender is a complex social phenomenon that shapes an individual's sense of personal identity and their interactions with others, and shapes the sets of social relations embedded in institutions such as the family, workplace, school, hospital, criminal justice system, and the State. The social significance attached to being female or male and the use of gender as a component of social structures varies between societies and over time (Du Plessis, 1994).

Gender identity and sexual orientation

In order to measure the diversity and complexity of gender identity (physical, genetic, emotional, etc) and sexual orientation concepts, new and separate definitions, questions, classifications, and statistical standards would be required.

Classification criteria

The criteria used to place a person into the classification are the biological characteristics of that person.

Classification

Sex is a flat classification with two categories:

- 1 Male
- 2 Female

No provision is made for residual categories as, in line with international practice, it is Statistics New Zealand policy to impute missing values for sex data.

Classification	Sex – New Zealand Standard Classification
Abbreviation	SEX
Version	V1.0
Effective date	26/01/1995

Coding process

Guidelines

Imputation: Where the response for the sex variable is not a single response, or if the sex variable is missing, a value of male or female should be imputed. If available, information such as the name of the person or their relationship to others in the household may be used to impute a value.

Indeterminate sex: In some circumstances, particularly administrative collections dealing with perinatal data, a third category may be required for individuals whose biological sex cannot be determined as male or female. They should be classified as being of 'indeterminate' sex. Where the collection uses numeric codes, the code '3' should be used. Some existing classifications use alpha codes.

The collection of indeterminate sex is currently limited to administrative settings where sex is verified as part of the data collection process. Sample or self-administered surveys will generally only require, and only be able to collect, male and female.

Within Statistics NZ the indeterminate sex category is applicable in processing of the birth registrations data used in the derivation of vital statistics. For statistical reporting purposes, sex will be imputed in those rare cases where it is recorded as indeterminate.

For collections which require a classification including indeterminate sex, the suggested classification for use with numeric codes is:

- 1 Male
- 2 Female
- 3 Indeterminate

In the limited range of data collections that include a third category for indeterminate sex (eg perinatal collections) it may also be useful to have an output category for indeterminate sex.

Questionnaire module

Requirements

Self-complete questionnaires: The standard questionnaire module should be a closed tick box question. The category male should be listed before female. This is a standard practice internationally. In pilot testing of the sex question with female listed before male the change of order confused both respondents and processing staff.

Example

The questionnaire module below is an example of a questionnaire module which meets the requirements documented in this standard. Other questionnaire modules may vary in format but should conform to the requirements contained in this standard.

3 Are you?

male

female

Mark your answer like this:

Interviewer administered questionnaires. An example of the question format if a respondent is asked the sex of another respondent or a child who is not at the interview is as follows: "Is [name] male or female?"

Standard Output

Sex

The standard output is the same as the classification categories, male and female.

Related classifications and standards

New Zealand

The New Zealand Standard Classification of Sex is related to the New Zealand Standard Classification of Sex of Sole Parent. Sex of sole parent is a derived variable that classifies one-parent families by the sex of the sole parent.

International

This statistical standard is consistent with the definition and classification recommended by the United Nations (2008).

Glossary

Gender

The socially and culturally perceived or expected dimensions of behaviour associated with males and females.

Imputation

Imputation is a statistical procedure that involves inserting a value when a respondent has not provided a valid response.

Indeterminate sex

Physical appearance and/or genetic testing does not enable a person to be classified as male or female. They can have a combination of male and female features, or features which are not characteristic of either sex.

Sex reassignment or assignment

Sex reassignment occurs where a person has undergone the necessary treatment to permanently change their sex. If a person's sex is indeterminate at birth, sex assignment occurs when they undergo treatment to become male or female.

References

Du Plessis, R (1994). Gender. In P Spoonley, D Pearson, & I Shirley (Eds), *New Zealand society* (2nd ed, pp 98–112). Wellington: Dunmore Press Ltd.

Statistics New Zealand (2006). *Introduction to the Census: 2006 Census of Population and Dwellings*. Wellington: Author.

United Nations (2008). *Principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses*. New York: Author.