

Measurement of Sexual Orientation at Statistics Canada

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UNECE Virtual Meetings on Gender Statistics



Overview



- Canadian context and measurement of sexual orientation at Statistics Canada
- Standards development: an update
- Measuring sexual orientation
- Challenges
 - for all national statistical organizations
 - specific to Canada.
- Initial findings from focus groups and consultation

Canadian context: legislation and statistical measures

Relevant Canadian legislative context

- **1996:** Canadian legislation included sexual orientation as a basis for protection in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*
- **2005:** Same-sex couples gain legal right to marry
- **2018:** gender expression and gender identity are added to the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and to the hate crime provisions in the *Criminal Code*.

Statistics Canada context

- **2001:** same-sex couples were first enumerated on the Census of Population
- **2003:** following qualitative and quantitative testing, the first question on sexual orientation is added to the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), and then subsequently the General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization in 2004
- **2015:** sexual behaviour is measured on the CCHS
- **2018:** the Canadian Health Survey of Children and Youth includes a measure of attraction
- **2018:** “Please specify: _____” response option is added to the sexual orientation question and numerous surveys begin collecting this module.

Measuring sexual orientation

2003

Do you consider yourself to be:

INTERVIEWER: Read categories to respondent.

- 1 ... heterosexual? (sexual relations with people of the opposite sex)
- 2 ... homosexual, that is lesbian or gay? (sexual relations with people of your own sex)
- 3 ... bisexual? (sexual relations with people of both sexes)

Present

What is your sexual orientation?

Would you say you are:

1. Heterosexual
2. Lesbian or gay
3. Bisexual
4. Or please specify:

The screenshot shows a survey question titled "Sexual orientation" with a "Reset" button in the top right corner. The question is "1. What is your sexual orientation?". Below the question is a dropdown menu with the text "Would you say you are:". The dropdown is open, showing four radio button options: "1. Heterosexual" (with a small "SOR_Q01" label below it), "2. Lesbian or gay", "3. Bisexual", and "4. Or please specify". Below the "Or please specify" option is a text input field with a "Specify your sexual orientation" label and a "SOR_S01" label below the field.

Standards development: an update

2016-2018: updates to sex standard (sex at birth) and creation of gender standard

2019-present: development of sexual orientation standard

Consultation and review process

- targeted expert consultation
- focus groups with LGBTQ2+ and cisgender heterosexual participants
- wide consultation through online platform
- cognitive testing (one-on-one interviews).

Planned products:

- recommended standard, classifications
- harmonized content, measures
- guidelines for implementation in surveys.



Challenges for all national statistical organizations

- **Small sample size**
 - fairly small subpopulation making disaggregation difficult
 - aggregation to wider LGBTQ2+ acronym covering SOGI-related identities more feasible, although less detailed.
- **Sensitivity**
- **Rapidly changing terminology**
 - the proverbial “alphabet soup”
 - generational change, rise of media representation and public education.



Challenges specific to Canada

- Ensuring official languages (English/French) are both considered in developing definitions, measures, and terminology.
- Measuring gender and sexual diversity among Indigenous peoples
 - inclusion of Two-Spirit as a response category in the sexual orientation (identity) measure vs. gender measure vs. separate measure entirely.
- Breaking time series with respect to existing statistics on sexual orientation.



Initial findings from testing and consultation

- Compared to historical testing, sexual orientation was seen as less sensitive and the general public was more familiar with terms like lesbian, gay and bisexual.
- Preference for a longer list of sexual identity options than the currently provided three.
- Sex and/or gender uniquely relate to each dimension of sexual orientation.



Thank you

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