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Topic (ii) Gender equality indicators

**GENDER STATISTICS AND KEY INDICATORS
OF WOMEN'S POSITION IN BRITAIN**

Submitted by the Women and Equality Unit and
the Office for National Statistics of the UK¹

Contributed Paper

Introduction

The broad framework for gender statistics in the UK is provided by National Statistics (NS). The primary aim of National Statistics is to provide an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful picture of the economy and society, and to support the formulation and monitoring of economic and social policies by government at all levels. It provides a focus for the work of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), the major provider of official statistics in the UK, and is the responsibility of the National Statistician, who is also the head of the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

In pursuing its overall aim, NS has a series of objectives, including:

- improving the quality, timeliness and relevance of its services to customers, both within government and the wider community;
- improving public confidence in official statistics by demonstrating that they are produced to the best professional standards and free from political interference; and,
- operating efficiently by improving value for money in the production of its outputs and minimising the burden on those who supply it with data.

The Office of National Statistics is developing key partnerships to meet these objectives with, among others, government departments and devolved administrations. The Women and Equality Unit (WEU) is one of these partners.

The aim of the WEU is to work across Government and with others to reduce and remove the barriers to opportunity for all and to bring about measurable improvements in the position of women that benefit society more generally. The Unit exists to ensure that there is clarity across Government about its equality objectives and that these objectives are achieved. WEU Research and Evaluation provide high-quality and reliable research and statistical briefing to contribute to achieving the aims of the Unit and to improving Government policies for women. There are four main elements to this:

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- a wide range of statistical briefing on gender issues, monitoring key indicators of the position of women in Britain and outlining changes in that position;
- close collaboration with Government Departments and external organisations, on research with a gender focus;
- WEU-commissioned research projects, if evidence is not available from other sources; and
- The Gender Research Forum (GRF), which is run by the WEU and co-sponsored by the ONS and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). It provides an opportunity for sharing and collaborating on issues of common interest and facilitating a dialogue between researchers and policy makers.

The main element of our programme for monitoring gender equality is a large-scale project on “Key Indicators of Women’s Position in Britain”, carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES). This study began in September 2001 and is currently nearing completion. In the following we will outline the aims of the project, and give an overview of its main findings, plans for dissemination and future research and how this work contributes to the wider framework of gender statistics in Britain.

Key Indicators of Women’s Position in Britain

The aim of this project is to identify a set of key statistics that accurately and meaningfully map women’s position relative to that of men across a wide range of areas, and draw together statistics from a wide range of sources to provide a comprehensive census and a reliable and comprehensive baseline against which future changes and improvements can be monitored.

There were several different stages to the project, as follows:

- to identify the areas the indicators should cover;
- to identify statistics and other sources of information on women’s position in Britain, which can be up-dated over time;
- to select a range of recommended key statistics that provide an accurate and meaningful indication of how well women are faring relative to men in the areas covered;
- to provide a baseline census (with a common reference date) of the recommended statistical indicators;
- to outline recent trends in these indicators; and
- to outline a schedule for gathering and/or up-dating the required information.

In choosing the key statistics, it had to be borne in mind that some of them would be collected by other Government Departments and external organisations. It has therefore been necessary to be particularly mindful of resource constraints and propose a set of indicators that are relevant and meaningful *and* represent the most economical way of gathering information. It was also important to choose statistically robust indicators that could ideally be broken down by age and/or ethnicity, to allow a more differentiated appraisal and also be given for different parts of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) to maximise comparability with other official sources and provide a cost-effective baseline against which devolved administrations could assess progress in gender equality in their area.

Key indicators of women’s position cover the following areas:

- Economic activity and employment
- Work-life balance
- Education and training
- Financial resources
- Participation in public life
- Health

- Crime
- Transport

It should be noted that a wide range of statistics was collected for each of these; only the most salient and robust were chosen as key indicators. The forthcoming research report contains a large number of baseline statistics that provide added definition and detail to the key indicators. It is not possible here to outline these in full and readers are referred to the report for further information. Details of this publication will be posted on the Unit's website www.womenandequalityunit.gov, under 'Research and Statistics'.

Before outlining what the proposed key indicators in each of these areas are and what current statistics tell us, it will be helpful to give a brief overview of demographic statistics and population trends to provide background and context.

In 2001, there were around 30.4 million women in the UK, compared with 29.6 million men; women accounted for 51% of the population. It is projected that proportions of men and women in the population are moving gradually towards equalisation and will have effectively evened out by 2025. Looking at the working age population as it is conventionally defined (men aged 16-64, women aged 16-59), 17 million women were of working age, compared with just over 19 million men. Working age accounts for 58% of all women and 66% of all men in the UK, as women retire earlier and have a longer life expectancy (which will be covered in more detail later). This is reflected in the average age, which is 40.3 years for women and 37.6 years for men.

Around 8% of the UK population are from an ethnic minority and 19% of all working-age people have a long-term health problem or disability; these proportions are broadly similar for men and women.

Economic activity and employment

Women's economic activity rates

rose from 71% in 1990 to 72% in 2001, while men's declined from 88% to 84% over the same period.

Proportion working full-time

56% of women in employment worked full-time in 2001, compared with 57% in 1990. For men, the proportion working full-time fell from 95% in 1990 to 91% in 2001. Over the 1990s, there has been a growth in part-time work, which has been more marked among men.

Industrial breakdown of employment

Women are more likely to work in public administration, education and health which account for 41% of women employment (and only 16% of men's) and in distribution, hotels and catering, which account for another 22% (and 17% of men's employment).

Occupational breakdown of employment

8% of women worked in managerial/professional occupations in 2001, compared with 18% of men. Over the 1990s, these occupations have been growing and this growth has been experienced by both men and women.

Work-life balance

Women's likelihood of returning to work after childbirth

has been increasing. In 1996, 67% of women who were at work during pregnancy returned to work compared with only 45% in 1988 and 24% in 1979.

Proportion of women working full-time following return to work

rose from 15% in 1988 to 24% in 1996.

Flexible working patterns

include flexitime, term-time working, annualised hours, job sharing and nine day fortnights. 25% of women in employment utilise flexible working patterns compared with 16% of men. Statistics indicate that there has been little change in the incidence of flexible working patterns over recent years.

Availability of childcare places

has been increasing throughout the second half of the 1990s. Good-quality, affordable childcare is essential to help women (and men) to balance work and family commitments.

Education and training

Qualification levels

Girls are more likely to achieve 5 or more GCSE grades A-C (56% in 1999/2000) than boys (45%).

Women's participation in higher education

In 1999/2000, 54% of full-time undergraduates were women, rising from 50% in 1994/5. The number of women undertaking post-graduate study also increased over recent years and they accounted for half of all post-graduate students in 1999/2000.

Occupations of women graduates

Women graduates are more likely than men to go into clerical and secretarial jobs and less likely to enter professional occupations.

Job-related training

Women are more likely than men to receive job-related training (18% compared with 14% in 2001) and this gap widened during the late 1990s.

Highest qualification levels

Across all age groups, men still have higher levels of qualification than women, as older women are less likely to have any qualifications. In 2000, 18% of women of working age had no qualifications, compared with 14% of men; this gap has narrowed from 26% and 19% respectively in 1993.

Financial resources

Full-time hourly earnings

The gender gap in hourly earnings reduced from women earning just 63% of men's hourly earnings in 1970 to 82% in 2000.

Part-time/full-time pay gap

Part-time work tends to attract lower pay than full-time work and women are more likely to work part-time. The ratio of women's part-time hourly earnings to men's full-time hourly earnings is around 60% and this has been fairly constant since the early 1990s.

Individual incomes

Taking account of all sources of income, including benefits as well as earnings, women's individual incomes are around 65% of men's.

Proportion with low incomes

Women are slightly more likely than men to live in low-income households – 55% of them do, compared to their share in the population of 51%.

Pension take-up

Full-time working women are as likely as men to be in a pension scheme (67% compared with 66%), but only 37% of part-time working women are member of a pension scheme.

Participation in public life

Women in the legislature

Women represent 18% of Members of Parliament; proportions in the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly are higher at 37% and 42% respectively.

Women in the executive

33% of Cabinet Ministers are women.

Women in public appointments

In 2000, 33% of appointees to non-departmental public bodies were women, a rise from 23% in 1992.

Women's participation in voluntary and community work

There is conflicting evidence on the gender differential in this area which will be further explored.

Health

Life expectancy

is higher for women than for men, though the differential is expected to narrow over the next 25 years. The life expectancy of a girl born in 2000 is 80.6 years compared with that of a boy, which is 75.8 years.

Death rates from selected causes

Women are less likely to die from the principal causes of death; differences between men and women are particularly significant for suicides, drug-related poisonings, lung cancer and heart disease.

Smoking, drinking and exercise

Women are less likely to smoke and drink above recommended daily amounts than men, but both smoking and drinking have increased among younger women in recent years.

Crime

Women as victims

Women are generally less likely to be victim of a violent crime, but are far more likely to experience domestic violence than men.

Women as perpetrators

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of women found guilty of indictable offences increased slightly and that of men decreased slightly. The number of women in prison also increased by more than that of men over the same period.

Fear of crime

Women are more worried about crime than men are, but overall levels of concern have fallen during the late 1990s.

Confidence in the criminal justice system

There is little gender difference in this.

Transport

Proportion with a full driving licence

has increased rapidly among women and has doubled between 1975 and 2000, from 29% to 60%.

Access to a car

Men continue to be the main driver in the household but the proportion of women who are main drivers in their household has risen over the last ten years from under one-quarter to one-third.

Main mode of transport

Walking and being a car passenger are more prevalent as main modes of transport for women than being a car driver that is the most prevalent mode of transport for men.

Purpose of trips made

Women are more likely to report shopping, escorting children and visiting friends as main purpose of trips made, whereas men are more likely than women to give commuting and travel on business as main reasons.

Dissemination

It is hoped to publish the full report of this project in October/November 2002 and disseminate it widely, including publication on the Unit's website (www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk). A series of summary documents will also be prepared, which will present key findings in a concise and user-friendly fashion.

Up-dating the key indicators

The core objective of this work has been to provide a reliable and comprehensive baseline for monitoring future changes in gender equality in Britain. In doing so, the study has utilised a wide range of statistical sources, from regular large-scale surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey, to ad hoc surveys, e.g. on work-life balance initiatives and their impact. The proposed programme for up-dating this information is still being finalised but will most likely consist of the following elements:

- quarterly up-dating of women's position in the labour market, using the Labour Force Survey. This is already available as the "WEU Gender Briefing" which is published every February, May, August and November on the Unit's website;
- an annual up-date census that will look at all key indicators and collect the most up-to-date information. As outlined above, many key indicators are covered by regular official surveys so it would be relatively straightforward to up-date them;
- a fuller appraisal (in a few years' time) which would aim for a more comprehensive up-date and would also explore whether key indicators should be revised and/or extended, in line with changes in women's lives and society in general.

Availability of and gaps in gender statistics

While the Key Indicators project has provided a wealth of information on the position of women relative to that of men in Britain, it has also highlighted gaps in the availability and coverage of gender statistics. These gaps will limit the comprehensiveness and timeliness of the key indicators and any future up-dates:

- lack of time series or systematic statistics. This includes areas where data are only collected in a one-off survey or existing survey evidence is based on small samples that do not allow a differentiated assessment e.g. broken down by age, ethnicity and disability. Surveys may also reflect regional differences e.g. the Scottish system of qualifications, which is different from the English one. This makes it difficult to arrive at aggregated national statistics.
- paucity of available information. In certain areas there is a genuine lack of data relating to the position of women in Britain, e.g. levels of adult literacy and numeracy.

- lack of longitudinal comparability. Longitudinal survey series often do not take place at the same time, so it may be difficult to find a common reference date. Collating statistics based on different time points can be problematic, as they are not strictly-speaking comparable and may reflect different social and economic contexts. Longitudinal comparability is also affected lack of consistency between waves of surveys i.e. definitions change and questions are revised/improved.

Official gender statistics review

Background

An NS review of official gender statistics is providing information on a fourth gap - a lack of a detailed understanding of the needs of users of official gender statistics. The review is part of a wider programme that aims to meet government and wider needs for disaggregated statistics in different equal opportunities areas, including gender, ethnicity, disability and age. The overall framework for quality assuring National Statistics stems from the Government's White Paper *Building Trust in Statistics* (1999) which sets out a framework for quality assuring National Statistics. Quality is defined as comprising seven criteria, which were adopted as analytical framework in assessing future priorities users identified during the review:

- Relevance - concepts, measurements and products reflect use needs
- Accuracy - usually measured as the average distance between the estimate and the true (unknown) parameter value, and includes both sampling and non-sampling sources of error
- Timeliness - punctuality in disseminating results and responsiveness to user needs
- Accessibility - results accessible in a user-friendly manner. Users provided with information about quality of the statistics and about methods used to derive the figures
- Comparability - allowing comparisons over time, geographies (sub-national, national, international) and between sub-populations
- Coherence - consistent standards; harmonised questions (between provisional and final estimates, different sources, etc); ability to use sources together and explanation for differences in estimates
- Completeness - coverage reflects user need (including the detail to which estimates are available). This attribute is strongly linked with relevance.

We have already discussed in detail the needs of policy makers for gender statistics, and there is a large and growing academic literature on the relative positions of men and women, and on differential experiences among and between women. This literature is multi-disciplinary, spanning sociology, psychology, economics, health studies and other disciplines. However, what we haven't known is whether the current status of official statistics limits the amount and range of research on gender issues, and how this might impact on policy. Nor do we know how such problems might best be addressed. The NS review set out to provide some answers, and while it will not report until December 2002, we are able to present some initial findings here.

The scope of the review extends beyond National Statistics to include all official statistics. Outputs will include a guide to official sources of gender statistics, and a policy compliance report to be submitted to National Statistics highlighting the gaps in current data - reflecting both user needs and producer capabilities. This report will enable an assessment to be made of the Government Statistical Service's policy on gender disaggregated statistics, specifically highlighting any missing areas in current data and attempting to bridge any gaps between user needs and producer capabilities. The policy states:

“the Government Statistical Service aims always to collect and make available statistics disaggregated by gender, except where considerations of practicality or cost outweigh the identified need”.

The review is multi-faceted, comprising: (i) a consultation of users, (ii) assessment of the production and dissemination official gender statistics, (iii) identification of official statistics that are disaggregated by

gender, distinguishing between data collection and dissemination, and (iv) identification of which official statistics are not currently gender-disaggregated. The brief discussion below relates only to the user consultation phase of the project.

Patterns of usage

The user consultation elicited 167 responses from government agencies, academics, local authorities, voluntary organisations, charities and individuals. We began by asking them general questions about the kinds of statistics they use, the purposes they put them to, and where and how they got hold of them. 97% had used or were currently users of gender statistics, most typically examining labour market issues (22%) population dynamics (16%) and social and welfare issues (16%). The most common uses of these statistics were research, policy development, and education. However, there were substantive numbers of users employing them for campaigning (25%) and fundraising purposes (20%) - both key activities of civil society organisations. We also found sizeable numbers of organisations using the statistics for target setting and planning, suggesting the statistics formed an information resource for organisational development.

Perhaps unsurprisingly since the review is of official statistics, users rely most upon central government for gender statistics, most especially in the form of government publications, reports, websites and books. Academic sources too are important - more than 50% of users got gender statistics from them. However, it is clear that a number of respondents also use a variety of other sources including voluntary organisations and local authorities. For instance, one-third of users got gender statistics from voluntary organisations, many of which will be using official statistics to inform their own reports and planning activities.

Problems faced by users

Having ascertained that there is both (i) a wide breadth of usage and (ii) concentrations among particular areas and types of activity, we now move on to discuss the problems users have faced in accessing and using official gender statistics in the UK. The main finding is that 70% of users have faced problems, the five most common of which were:

- data not being broken down in the way required (20%)
- a lack of availability (13%)
- data were not timely (12%)
- other (11%)
- and problems accessing the data (10%).

These essentially relate to the completeness and accessibility of the statistics. Looking in more detail at the 'other' answers, we found that the most typical problem was that data were not user friendly (to an extent they failed the accessibility quality criterion). This may reflect a lack a flexibility in the way that official statistics are presented in reports and publications, and points up the need to make better use of web-based platforms for presenting and providing gender statistics.

What do users want?

We concluded by asking users what their priorities would be for developing official gender statistics in the UK. Unlike other parts of the formal consultation process, here we invited responses using an open question. We encouraged the respondents to be as open and free with their hopes for the future as possible, since these are the issues that will help to inform future collection, analysis, and dissemination of official statistics.

Predictably, we were given an extremely wide range of responses, which were then coded into broader priorities, and were linked with the seven quality principles defined above. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: User priorities for developing official gender statistics

Priority	% users	Main quality criterion
Further breakdown of data	35%	Completeness
More accessibility	13%	Accessibility
More time series	11%	Comparability
More analysis	10%	Coherence
Up to date	8%	Timeliness
Methodology details	8%	Accessibility
Regional / international data	6%	Comparability
More statistics <i>per se</i>	6%	Completeness
Meaningful and relevant	2%	Relevance

Six of the seven quality criteria feature in this table, the exception being accuracy. The implication is that while official gender statistics are seen as authoritative in respect of their validity and reliability, there are user needs for more detailed data, which are accessible in a range of ways. What seems clear is that the key issue facing users of official gender statistics is the ability to link them with other key variables of interest, most especially age and ethnicity. Research and theory suggest the interaction of these characteristics has implications for policy makers, for which better statistics are needed to help develop evidence based policy. NS is currently planning separate but related reviews on other key equal opportunities statistics including age, disability, and ethnicity. While these three, plus gender, are substantive topics in their own right, the aim is to focus as much on the links between them as on their particular characteristics and consequences.

The results from the user consultation will be linked with a consultation of the producers of official gender statistics. A final report will seek to balance user need with producer capabilities, in devising a set of actionable recommendations to develop official gender statistics in the UK.

And finally

It is hoped that this paper has outlined the wealth and depth of gender statistics in the UK and how this is being further developed both by the Key Indicators study and the review of gender statistics. These statistics are disseminated widely and are available for public use and scrutiny, and they provide a reliable, sound and impartial basis for public debate and policy development.