

Update on the Household Pulse Survey

Amy Symens Smith

Demographer, U.S. Census Bureau

Online Meeting of the UNECE Group of Experts on Gender Statistics 2021

28-29 September 2021

Household Pulse Survey (HPS) Overview

The HPS is an online self-administered survey asked of respondents aged 18 years and over

It was launched in collaboration with multiple federal agencies in April 2020

The purpose is to quickly and efficiently gauge the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on households from a social and economic perspective

The HPS is designed to provide near real-time information

HPS Update Includes Questions on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Earlier versions of the HPS asked respondents for their sex (male or female). The new phase rewords this question and adds two new items

- **What sex were you assigned at birth on your original birth certificate?**

Choice of answers: Male or Female

- **Do you currently describe yourself as male, female or transgender?**

Choice of answers: Male, Female, Transgender or None of these

The latest version of the survey now asks about sexual orientation, too:

- **Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?**

Choice of answers: Gay or lesbian; Straight, that is not gay or lesbian; Bisexual; Something else; I don't know

Additional HPS Updates

A variety of new questions that capture topical events such as:

- Child Tax Credit payment
- COVID-19 vaccinations now available for ages 12 and up
- Household energy expenditures and consumption
- Children's summer educational activities
- Rental assistance from state and local governments
- HPS continues to measure:

Core demographic household characteristics

Physical and mental health

Housing security

Education disruptions

Food sufficiency

Employment

Household spending

Transportation

Working Group on SOGI Items in HPS: Report and Recommendations

Working Group conclusions from existing literature and data collections:

- Respondents do not have difficulty providing responses to SOGI items in general
- The addition of SOGI items does not lead to survey breakoffs
- Write-in responses to “something else” provide mixed results
- Two-step gender identity questions are recommended by many researchers
- However, these questions do not work well for all transgender individuals as some gender minority groups do not see transgender as an identity distinct from male or female; others prefer genderqueer or another term for female or male
- Some studies use a third confirmation question

HPS Gender Reporting Categories

The Working Group recommended four gender categories for reporting:

1. Male – would be determined by Q1 male AND Q2 male
2. Female – would be determined by Q1 female AND Q2 female
3. Gender minority would be any of these combinations:
 - a. Q1 female and Q2 male
 - b. Q1 male and Q2 female
 - c. Q2 transgender
4. None of these

There is not enough evidence at this time to inform classifying “none of these” into the “gender minority” category

Future Work

In general, cognitive testing is beneficial for gender identity questions

There may be future opportunities to explore split-sample testing to examine survey items wording differences

Some areas of study might be to:

Incorporate the addition of “intersex” or “X” in the question test on birth certificates

Test the use of “man” or “woman” as response options for gender identity

Consider a “check all that apply” response option for gender

It’s important not to take the HPS as prevalence estimates of sexual orientation and gender identity minority populations

What the HPS data does provide is another demographic variable for us in looking at various indicators for the SOGI population and helps measure the impact on federal programs and improve equitable deployment of services