

Report shows slow progress on sex-disaggregated data

December 11 2020



A group of women in sari in India. A new report raises a question on the limited availability of sex-disaggregated information related to COVID-19 and other societal issues. (Public domain)

Most countries in the world are not publishing data disaggregated by sex, thereby putting a strain on efforts to improve gender equality, according to the latest Open Data Inventory.

The [ODIN report](#) showed that open data publication is improving around the world, but [gender](#) data is not being made available to the same extent, with many countries unable to provide gender specific data on the wide-ranging impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other societal issues.

The report found that the volume of open data disaggregated according to sex rose by 21 percent between 2016 and 2020. This compared to an overall increase in open data publication of 40 percent, despite the pandemic hindering statistics production.

The team at Open Data Watch, the organization that compiled the ODIN report, defined gender-relevant data as [statistical information](#) relating to education, health, food, crime and labor, alongside data collected specifically for gender-equality purposes.

The absence of sex-disaggregated information on these topics can undermine policies to support women, says Lorenz Noe, a senior data analyst at Open Data Watch and co-author of the report, published in summary on 3 December, with the full report to be released in February 2021.

"Disparities between the sexes as shown in the data can often spur action on an issue and be used to monitor results," he tells SciDev.Net. "But without such data, decision-makers can't be held to account."

Availability of gender specific data does not always indicate progress on gender equality, however. According to the report, poorer regions in Africa and the Caribbean struggle the most to publish sex-disaggregated data, while many Middle Eastern countries publish such data in some detail, despite ranking low on indexes of women's rights.

Such differences are especially stark because many poorer countries are

making significant progress on publishing open data, with the median score for such activity increasing by 6.4 points over the past year—the biggest jump since the ODIN report was first compiled in 2016. This year, Mongolia became the first non-industrial country to enter the top ten global publishers of open data, while the Philippines and Palestine have made it into the top 30.

Jamison Crowell, Open Data Inventory manager and lead author of the report, says the coverage score of sex-disaggregated data, which determines whether it is collected at all, is lower than the openness score, which measures availability. This, he says, means that the data simply does not get collected in the first place, although it is likely to be published when it is gathered.

"Whether this is due to an innate reluctance to collect and report gender-related data or a lack of capacity to carry out the necessary data collection is hard to say," he says.

Sarah Hawkes, co-founder of Global Health 50/50, an advocacy group for gender equality in healthcare, believes, however, that sex-disaggregated data is collected widely. This is because a person's gender is easily standardized—with the exception of people identifying as non-binary—and is often the first data point collected about a person using healthcare facilities.

"When you go to hospital, or when you fill out a death certificate, sex is the box that is always ticked," she says. "The reason why such [data](#) does not get reported is that authorities do not attach any importance to it."

More information: odin.opendatawatch.com/Report/Reports

Provided by SciDev.Net

Citation: Report shows slow progress on sex-disaggregated data (2020, December 11) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-12-sex-disaggregated.html>

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