

# S/he Uses Statistics on Women and Men

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## 1. The need for statistics on women and men

Although much experience, knowledge, and attitudes are shared by women and men throughout the stages of the life cycle - childhood, youth, adult life, and ageing - there are also great differences between the sexes. This has led to different life-patterns for women and men as groups, given other societal groupings, for example, social class.

How is this situation reflected in the analyses and presentation of statistics? We are all there to be counted, girls and boys, women and men, in censuses, surveys, and administrative registers. What kind of information are we able to find if we want to compare the situation of girls and women to that of boys and men in different areas of society?

In the governments' evaluation of the United Nations Decade of Women 1975-1985, the lack of adequate facts, subdivided by gender and presented in a way suitable for use of planners and decision-makers, was identified as one of the most important obstacles for changing the situation of women. At the Nairobi Conference 1985, the Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women until the year 2000 was adopted. The strategies emphasise that measures must be taken in all areas of society to reach equality between the sexes. Both national and international goals for equal opportunity are now ratified, and active work is in progress everywhere in the world. However, a lot needs to be achieved before the goals are reached.

It is important to note that equal opportunity has both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Qualitatively equal opportunity means that women's and men's experiences, knowledge, and values are safeguarded and are used to enrich and influence the development within all spheres of society. Quantitatively it means that there is to be an equal distribution of women and men within all areas of society, for example, within various study programmes and occupations. The quantitative aspect is analysed by means of statistics.

The strategies emphasise the need for accurate, timely, relevant, and user-oriented statistics concerning the situation of women compared to that of men in all areas of

society. Such statistics are needed to raise consciousness about the situation today and changes over time, to provide ideas for measures to be taken, to provide a sound base for policy, and to evaluate the effects of measures that have been taken.

Special emphasis is laid on measuring the remunerated and, in particular, the unremunerated contributions of women (and men) in all sectors of development and to reflect them in economic statistics, in national accounts, and in the GDP.

It is very important to make both the women's and the men's worlds visible. Women and men should always be presented side by side in statistics. From that it is possible to judge if women and men are both visible to the same extent in the real world in all areas of society and to evaluate how far we have reached concerning the quantitative aspect of equal opportunity.

## **2. Towards improved statistical information on women and men**

To fulfill national and international goals for equal opportunity, it is important to improve gender-related statistics. Basic work must be done at the national level as part of improving national statistics. Producers of statistics must be sensitised to gender issues. Statisticians have the main responsibility to cooperate with potential users, to identify their needs, and to develop and present statistics in a user-oriented way. The problems we must work on are:

- (i) under-utilisation of existing data;
- (ii) data gaps;
- (iii) biased measures, concepts, and classifications;
- (iv) poor linkage between users and producers of gender-specific statistics.

## **3. Improved utilisation of existing data**

There are increasing complaints from potential users about the lack of gender-specific information. A considerable amount of the available data shows the situation of pupils, students, people within or outside the labour force, wage earners, elderly, etc. without analysing the differences and similarities between women and men in the given category.

However, useful gender-divided statistics already exist in every country. The problem is that the statistics are difficult to find and understand by non-statisticians and that the statisticians are not aware of the need for equal opportunity statistics.

Many statistical surveys collect data by sex, but it is often regarded as less important to present the information by gender. Also, the existing statistics are scattered in subject-matter areas (e.g. education, labour force, salaries, causes of death). Last, but not least, statistical information presented in the traditional way in detailed tables is usually dull and difficult to understand by non-statisticians and thus not very useful to them.

In every country, existing statistics can be used to give a broad view of the situation of women compared to that of men. The most urgent concerns should be dealt with first. If such statistics are presented in an interesting way with simple tables,

diagrams, and analysing text, the users will be able to see patterns and interdependencies between phenomena in different areas of society, and identify key areas to be analysed more in detail. Workshops with users and producers of statistics will be useful in the process of identifying needs for improvement, both in statistics and in real life.

Existing data could also be used for deeper analysis in key areas using more sophisticated statistical methods. One such area is the correlation between education, occupation, and income for women and men.

The United Nations Department of Technical Cooperation for Development (DTCD) and the Statistical Office have been working with the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) to improve the utilisation of existing statistics in a number of ways. The report "Compiling Social Indicators on the Situation of Women" (1984) explains how to develop indicators from sources of data which already exist in most countries. The United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistics Data Base, known as Wistat, has been developed for microcomputers with support from the United Nations Population Fund. It contains statistics available in the statistical services of the United Nations for 178 countries. It has been used to prepare a large "Compendium of Statistics and Indicators on the Situation of Women 1986". Another format used by the Statistical Office for presentation of statistics is posters on the situation of women. The first was prepared for the Nairobi Conference in 1985 and the second was presented in March 1990.

"Women and Social Trends 1970-1990" will be published in the fall by the United Nations. It is a critical and analytical summary of statistics and indicators of women's situations worldwide and how it has changed, based on Wistat.

Examples from different countries of ways of presenting gender-specific statistics will be given at the seminar.

#### **4. Improved content, measurements, concepts, and classifications**

Although a lot can be done to analyse the situation of women and men with existing data, there is a lack of data in important areas. Also, measurements, concepts, and classifications in a number of areas are, to a certain extent, biased in relation to the subject-matter area concerning equal opportunity.

Traditionally, so-called economic activities and labour force participation are measured and presented in statistics. Women are, to a greater extent than men, invisible in such statistics. They are often classified as housewives, not economically active, although, to a great extent, they combine the main responsibility for the household, domestic chores and care for children, with economic activities. They are also more often than men found to work in the informal sector of the economy, an area where statistical improvements are required. New surveys, measuring in great detail all kinds of activities, paid or unpaid, in the formal, informal, and domestic sectors, must be carried out. Time-use studies are of great relevance in this area.

The concept "head of household" is widely used but also much questioned. If the concept is used, the measurement procedure must be improved and the statistics presented together with a more detailed picture of household composition.

Other areas of great importance for improvement are education (literacy, school enrolment and attendance, drop-out rates, subjects of study in higher education), health

(causes of diseases and death, health facilities), income (individual and household, control of income), access to credit, power and influence (political, labour unions, managerial positions in public and private sectors).

The United Nations Department of Technical Cooperation for Development (DTCD) and the Statistical Office have been working to improve gender statistics in a number of ways. Guidelines are given in the reports "Improving Concepts and Methods for Statistics and Indicators on the Situation of Women" (1984) and "Improving Statistics and Indicators on Women Using Household Surveys" (1988). "Handbook for National Statistical Data Bases on Women and Development" will be published in 1990, and a handbook on "Compilation of Statistics on Women in the Informal Sector in Industry, Trade and Services in Africa" is under preparation with INSTRAW.

Also, the Statistical Office and DTCD help to organise the participation in workshops with users and producers of statistics and give technical assistance in production and presentation of gender statistics.

## **5. Cooperation between users and producers of statistics on women and men and the role of the statistician**

Close and continuous cooperation between users and producers of gender-specific statistics must be developed in order to improve existing statistics and respond to new needs. While both partners have a responsibility to improve cooperation, statisticians have the main responsibility to improve statistics, including presentation and dissemination.

The statisticians must seek out and encourage potential users of gender-specific statistics. The users are women and men with individual needs. Mostly they are non-statisticians and need help from statisticians who understand their individual problem areas. To identify and respond to the whole range of users' needs the statistical professionals as a group must cover a great variety of experiences and knowledge of the problem areas in society.

In the field of statistics, women remain a minority. It is important to take steps to increase the number of women statisticians and to benefit from women's experiences when improving statistical theory and practice. Women have to be encouraged at an early stage at school to study mathematics and to continue their studies at higher levels of education. The wide range of practical uses of mathematics and statistics must be made clear to them.

Women statisticians must be visible as role models for the young generation. Of great importance for a change in the situation today is a higher participation of women as teachers, researchers, and administrators in the statistical field.

An example of a successful strategy of improving gender-specific statistics is the work in Sweden. A special unit for equal opportunity statistics with statisticians covering different statistical areas was established in 1983 at Statistics Sweden. In close cooperation with potential users, gender-specific statistics have been collected, presented, and disseminated in different ways. The staff also participate as planners and lecturers in seminars and workshops on equal opportunity issues, organised by schools, universities, and governmental, political, trade union, and non-governmental organisations.

## 6. Statistics on women and men in educational situations

To reach equal opportunities, we often rely on the younger generation. But girls and boys are influenced by what they see and hear. Adults are important role models. The gender division of the paid and unpaid work activities, which is a reality even today all over the world, as well as inequalities in other areas of society, have a great impact on young people's attitudes and behaviour.

As stated at the beginning, statistics are widely used in society and influence everyone's knowledge and attitudes - a continuous "education" through life. Today's pupils are influenced by today's statistics and will be tomorrow's users and producers of statistics.

Teachers at all educational levels including university, can do a lot to make students aware of the situation today and discuss ways of changing it. Gender-oriented subjects and examples should be used in teaching mathematics and statistics. Such statistics should also be used in other subjects, for example in social and domestic sciences. Statistical research at universities and research institutes on gender issues should be encouraged.

Teachers at all educational levels, including university, must be gender-sensitised themselves to be able to use statistics related to gender issues. They also have to be aware of the way they treat girls and boys at school. For these reasons, gender issues should be part of the subjects in the teachers' own education.