



dialogues

Energy citizenship
for a sustainable future

Gender issues in energy surveys

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Energy surveys, Gender roles, Gender-sensitive language, Gender-neutral wording, Gender justice

GenderCC- Women for Climate Justice e.V.



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Dealing with gender issues in surveys is more than just adding a 'diverse' option within the demographic questions. First, asking for sex or gender is not trivial, and second, there are more questions in the demographic section which should be properly worded to reflect changing gender roles and relations. Third, the sequence of questions plays a role, too. These are general issues to be considered in all surveys independently of the specific topic. Finally, specifically for surveys on energy, some further considerations are relevant, such as gendered attitudes and preferences towards energy and around technologies in general.

Gender-sensitive Language: Using gender-sensitive inclusive language throughout questionnaires is a must, in order to acknowledge diversity, convey respect to all people, being sensitive to differences, and promote gender justice. This includes avoiding male-only forms of substantives and pronouns and seeking for gender-neutral wording, depending on the specific language.

Order of questions: Stereotype threat effects occur, among others, if the sex is recorded at the beginning of a test or questionnaire. This was particularly reported in the context of math tests (Danaher & Crandall, 2008). There is no reason why this effect should not occur related to other topics, as the sex/gender question may trigger expectations conforming to gender stereotypes.

Flexibility: Furthermore, it is advisable to use a wording of questions that allows to capture characteristics or constellations you wouldn't have thought of, such as 'which of the following best represents your ...?', rather than 'please select', and to offer 'fill in the blank' options, such as 'prefer to self-describe: _____'.

Demographic questions

Sex or gender?

First of all, researchers should clarify what they want to know, the biological sex or the gender identity. Even though most researchers are aware of the difference between 'sex' and 'gender', they often use only 'gender', even if they want to ask for sex. Probably the reason for that is that they wish to avoid the term 'sex' which could be understood as somewhat explicit language.

Sex can be defined in different ways, e.g. assigned at birth or recorded on legal documents. As soon as these allow for a third option, which is the case in an increasing number of countries (such as Germany, Australia, the US, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Argentina, Colombia) you have a non-binary system. If you ask for 'sex', answers can be female/male/intersex, if you ask for 'gender', there might be numerous options beyond 'women' and 'man'.

For most topics that don't revolve around physiological features such as medicine, it can be assumed that it makes sense to ask for gender.

Why and how to ask for gender in an inclusive way

How relevant and useful is it to include at least a third option on sex/gender? The regular IPSOS global LGBTIQ* survey in 30 countries shows, that 3% of the population identifies transgender, non-binary or another form of identity beyond female or male. This proportion is increasing for younger people, for example it is 6% of the generation younger than 25 years (IPSOS, 2023). An increasing number of countries offer a third gender option on their passports, e.g. Austria and Germany based on a medical assessment, and Denmark, Ireland and Canada based on a self-declaration.

There is evidence, that questions on gender identity (and sexual orientation) do not discourage respondents, for example for the US by Census Bureau's research (Ellis et al., 2017). Significantly more respondents rather skipped the question about income than questions on gender identity or sexual orientation.

In order to ensure a questionnaire is inclusive, at least one third option beyond 'female' or 'male' should be offered, e.g. 'other' or a fill-in-the-blank option. We would not recommend to use 'diverse' as the third option, because it does not fit for an individual.

In most cases, further details on gender identity are not required, unless this information is actually analysed. In other words, we should consider first why we ask these questions and how we will use the data. Only if a survey seeks to specifically analyse, e.g. attitudes and behaviour of the gender-nonconforming population, we should ask in-depth questions on gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. Moreover, we should explain to respondents why we are asking these questions, as some of them may feel uncomfortable sharing detailed information. For a thorough examination of options to ask for gender identity and of the response of relevant groups, see e.g. (Balarajan et al., 2011).

A possible wording could be: "Which of the following options best describes your gender identity? (Select all that apply)"

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary/genderqueer
- Transgender
- Prefer not to say
- Another gender identity (please specify): [open text box]

It is important to avoid mixing up gender identity with sexual orientation. It does not make sense to offer the options LGBTIQ in one question, e.g. "Do you personally identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?" These are not necessarily alternatives, since LGB is about sexual orientation and the others about identity or, in the case of I (inter) about a biological trait.

Other demographic questions

Here, again, the first question is what information is really needed and analysed later on. Is it actually the formal marital status or rather the constellation in which a person is living, e.g. together with adults or children? In order to avoid familialism, more flexible options should be offered than traditional forms of families, e.g. 'in a partnership' rather than 'married'; 'number of children in your household' rather than 'how many children do you have', and for the household also 'co-housing or 'flat-sharing'.

For example, a question about children could be worded "How many children are you parent or guardian for and live in your household (aged 17 or younger only)?", and a question on the constellation in which someone is living could offer the following options:

- Single
- In a stable relationship but not cohabitant
- Family without children
- Family with children
- Flat-sharing or co-housing
- Other
- I don't want to specify it

Critical issues regarding gender are also paid work and unpaid care work. Questions on occupation should include an option on unpaid care work, in order to avoid discriminating against housework, by suggesting it is not 'real' work. As for care work and household chores, some differentiation is useful, as an increasing number of people share these tasks, e.g.: "Do you have the main responsibility for household chores and caring for other household members? (e.g. childcare, elderly, etc.)?"

- Yes
- Yes, with domestic help
- I share with other members of the household
- No

Content related questions

"Traditional surveys where one household member answers questions about the overall household behaviour cannot capture the intricate pattern of how household chores are divided between men, women and children. However, time surveys that are specific for men and women may be a good tool for indicating how energy efficiency measures may affect the workload for various household members" (Carlsson-Kanyama & Lindén, 2007, p. 2171).

Several topics related to energy have a clear gender dimension:

Energy poverty affects women disproportionately, in particular single mothers and elderly women (Feenstra & Clancy, 2020; Olgu Gizem Birgi et al., 2021).

The so called '**gender eco-gap**' is evidenced for many countries e.g. by (ISSP Research Group, 2019) and confirmed for energy by the meta-analysis of our data (Dialogues D4.2): "the more concerned a respondent is with energy saving in the home, the more likely the respondent is a woman". The gap is smaller in "societies with higher levels of gender inequality, economic scarcity, power distance, and collectivism" (Chan et al., 2019).

Decision-making in the household, including with its dynamics due to changing gender roles, see, e.g., (Bartiaux, 2022).

Division of care work and household chores: Time use surveys such as the harmonised European time use survey (HETUS) which takes place every 10 years provide a detailed picture. It shows that women still spend more time on household and care activities than men, and that activities differ. E.g. women tend to be more involved in food management, cleaning, laundry, while men tend to be in charge of construction and gardening. In particular the mental load of organising the household and children's schedules, as well as supervision and accompanying children is mainly done by women.

Attitudes towards and practices related to technologies: A clear indication for the gender technology gap is the career choice: According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), only 33% of STEM graduates are women. In some fields such as ICT, the share of women is even declining (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018).

It should be noted that there are national differences of gender roles and relations which influence attitudes, in particular the gender eco gap. Therefore, it might be advisable to look into national data, rather than only doing a cross-national analysis which might blur or even out these differences.

Questions on these critical issues should be part of any survey on energy citizenship. Yet, for some of these topics, there is a gender bias which should be taken into consideration when analysing the answers:

Care work: Men tend to overestimate their contributions, and in particular neglect the mental work

Decision-making in the household: Women with care responsibilities make numerous small decisions, but not necessarily the large ones, yet, they often have some kind of a veto right. Moreover, indications for a perception bias on the own influence

Technology: There is very strong connection with gender roles and stereotypes. Men tend to overestimate their knowledge, women tend to underestimate it. Moreover, men tend to believe more in the lack of technical knowledge of women, which might, in turn, affect women in group situations.

As a result, subjective scales of women and men are different, and the question is if and how it is possible to adjust for these biases.

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