

Handout: Gender-related Terms and Definitions

Sex

Sex is the classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia. (USAID March 2012 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy)

Gender

A culturally-defined set of economic, social, and political roles, responsibilities, rights, entitlements obligations, associated with being female and male, as well as the power relations between and among women and men, boys and girls. The definition and expectations of what it means to be a woman or girl and a man or boy, and sanctions for not adhering to those expectations, vary across cultures and over time, and often intersect with other factors such as race, class, age and sexual orientation. Transgender individuals, whether they identify as men or women, are subject to the same set of expectations and sanctions. (OHA/PEPFAR, modified from IGWG)

Gender Equity

The process of being fair to women and men, boys and girls. To ensure fairness, measures must be taken to compensate for cumulative economic, social, and political disadvantages that prevent women and men, boys and girls from operating on a level playing field. (IGWG training resources)

Gender Equality

The state or condition that affords women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunities, and resources. Genuine equality means more than parity in numbers or laws on the books; it means expanded freedoms and improved overall quality of life for all people (IGWG training resources; USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy)

Gender-based Violence

In the broadest terms, “gender-based violence” is violence that is directed at individuals based on their biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to culturally-defined expectations of what it means to be a woman and man, girl and boy. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private. GBV is rooted in economic, social, and political inequalities between men and women. GBV can occur throughout the lifecycle, from infancy through childhood and adolescence, the reproductive years and into old age (Moreno 2005), and can affect women and girls, and men and boys, including transgender individuals.

Specific types of GBV include (but are not limited to) female infanticide; early and forced

This training module was adapted from materials created by the Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) and funded by USAID. These materials may have been edited; to see the original training materials you may download this training module in its pdf format).

marriage, “honor” killings, and female genital cutting/mutilation; child sexual abuse and exploitation; trafficking in persons; sexual coercion, harassment and abuse; neglect; domestic violence; economic deprivation, and elder abuse. (Adapted from USG Strategy for the Prevention and Response to Gender-based Violence)

Empowerment

Expansion of people's capacity to make and act upon decisions affecting all aspects of their lives - including decisions related to health - by proactively addressing socioeconomic, and other power inequalities in a context where this ability was previously denied. Programmatic interventions often focus specifically on empowering women, because of the inequalities in their socioeconomic status. (Adapted from Naila Kabeer's definition of empowerment)

Men's Engagement

Men's engagement is a programmatic approach that involves men and boys a) as clients and beneficiaries, b) as partners and c) as agents of change, in actively promoting gender equality, women's empowerment and the transformation of inequitable definitions of masculinity. In the health context, this comprises engaging men and boys in addressing their own, and supporting their partners' reproductive, sexual and other health needs. Men's engagement also includes broader efforts to promote equality with respect to caregiving, fatherhood, and division of labor, and ending gender-based violence.

Gender Mainstreaming

Process of incorporating a gender perspective into organizational policies, strategies, and administrative functions, as well as into the institutional culture of an organization. This process at the organizational level ideally results in meaningful gender integration as outlined below. (adapted from IGWG training resources)

Gender Integration

Strategies applied in programmatic design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to take gender considerations (as defined above, in “gender”) into account and to compensate for gender-based inequalities. (adapted from IGWG training resources)

Transgender

Transgender is an umbrella term referring to individuals who do not identify with the sex category assigned to them at birth or whose identity or behavior falls outside of stereotypical gender norms. The term “transgender” encompasses a diverse array of gender identities and expressions, including identities that fit within a female/male classification and those that do not.

Transgender is not the same as intersex, which refers to biological variation in sex

characteristics, including chromosomes, gonads and/or genitals that do not allow an individual to be distinctly identified as female/male at birth.

Gender identity

Gender identify refers to one’s internal sense of being male, female, neither or both.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation refers to one’s sexual or romantic attractions, and includes sexual identity, sexual behaviors and sexual desires.

Homophobia

The fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behavior or cultures. Homophobia also refers to internalized heterosexism by homosexuals as well as the fear of men or women who transgress the socio-cultural definitions of what it is to be a “true man or woman” or embody “true masculinity or femininity.” (adapted from IGWG training resources)

Heterosexism

The presumption that everyone is heterosexual and/or the belief that heterosexual people are naturally superior to lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual people. (adapted from IGWG training resources)