



EXPANDING SOGIESC DATA COLLECTION Through Partnerships

AUTHORS:
Miguel Fuentes
Ari Shaw

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Data collection is critical to the development of sound policies and programs, particularly on issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Accurate data is essential to fully understand the experiences and needs of populations with diverse SOGIESC and to identify areas where inequalities and discrimination persist around the world. However, data collection on SOGIESC issues often remains challenging due to a number of factors, including stigma; discrimination; a lack of technological, economic, or human resources to measure sufficiently large samples; a need for specialized SOGIESC expertise within government and civil society institutions; and the absence of political will.

In response to these challenges, this brief describes strategies to improve SOGIESC data collection through a variety of collaborations across institutions and sectors: 1) partnerships between research institutions and private polling firms; 2) partnerships between research institutions and government agencies; and 3) partnerships between research institutions and civil society organizations and networks. These strategies are not intended to be exhaustive; rather, we draw on the experiences of Williams Institute scholars and collaborators collecting data on SOGIESC to put forward illustrative cases that could inform future data-collection efforts. While the viability of some strategies may depend upon local contexts, including the legal and social environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people,¹ we hope these offer frameworks for envisioning new projects, collaborations, and pathways to improve data collection on SOGIESC.

¹ We use the acronym LGBTQI+ throughout the brief to refer to data on lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, intersex, and other minority sexual orientations and gender identities. We recognize this acronym does not reflect the full spectrum of sexual and gender diversity that exists. Users of this document are invited to adapt the strategies to whichever data is available in their contexts in terms of SOGIESC. When describing data collection for a specific research project or study, we use the acronym corresponding to the specific subgroups for which data were collected in that case.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND PRIVATE POLLING FIRMS

Individual researchers or research institutions may lack the capacity to conduct comprehensive surveys on SOGIESC that include a sufficient sample of respondents, including LGBTQI+ persons. Polling firms can provide access to both general and targeted populations of interest but may lack specialized expertise in designing and implementing surveys that include measures of SOGIESC. Researchers can work with private polling firms by administering original surveys that capitalize on the expertise of each partner to collect original survey data on SOGIESC from larger samples.

Gallup and the Generations/TransPop Surveys

Comprehensive data collection on LGBTQI+ people within a country is often hindered by the inability to access a national probability sample of this population—the “gold standard” for demographic data analysis. To achieve this, the Williams Institute and other academic research institutions partnered with Gallup, a global survey firm, to conduct two studies using national probability samples of sexual and gender minorities, respectively. The Generations Study used the Gallup Daily Tracking Survey and random-digit dialing to recruit 1,000 lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults from across the U.S.² Similarly, for the TransPop Study, Gallup employed random-digit dialing and address-based sampling procedures to recruit a probability sample of transgender people in the U.S., as well as a comparison sample of cisgender persons.³

The Williams Institute and other academic collaborators provided technical expertise to design culturally sensitive survey methodologies, while Gallup provided the technological and geographic reach necessary to ensure quality sampling. Both studies brought together an interdisciplinary team of scholars from fields of public policy, psychology, medicine, and statistics, drawing on this diverse expertise to generate data and analyses on the stress, resilience, mental health, and well-being of different age cohorts of LGBT people. These collaborations enabled the collection of data from hard-to-reach populations across the U.S. and highlighted the unique needs of diverse subgroups within the LGBT population.

Morning Consult and Employment Experiences Survey

LGBTQI+ people continue to face stigma and discrimination in employment.⁴ However, limited data on SOGIE-based exclusion in employment poses challenges for policymakers and advocates seeking to develop effective policies and programs to address this inequity. Without data, it becomes difficult to understand the full scope and impact of discrimination in the workplace.

In 2021, the Williams Institute collaborated with polling firm Morning Consult to field the Employment Experiences Survey, gathering data on SOGIE-based employment discrimination during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵

² For more detail on the methods employed in the Generations Study see Evan A Krueger et al., “Methodology and Technical Notes Gallup Quantitative Survey” (The Williams Institute, May 26, 2021), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54f4cc0be4b0014ec19fcbab/t/60b13636b9da204095dab1ae/1622226489278/Generations+Quantitative+Survey+Methods+v21_copy.pdf.

³ Evan A Krueger et al., “TransPop - U.S. Transgender Population Health Survey (Methodology and Technical Notes)” (The Williams Institute, May 28, 2020), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55958472e4b0af241ecac34f/t/5ef1331ecc152d3b60f068d6/1592865567882/TransPop+Survey+Methods+v18+FINAL+copy.pdf>.

⁴ Christy Mallory, Andrew R. Flores, and Brad Sears, “Workplace Discrimination and Harassment Against LGBT State & Local Government Employees,” November 2021, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/public-sector-workplace-discrim/>.

⁵ Brad Sears et al., “LGBT People’s Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment” (The Williams Institute, September 2021),

Morning Consult provided access to their anonymous, cross-sectional panel of 1,007 U.S. LGBT adults in the workforce the week of March 1, 2020. The Williams Institute provided questions to screen panelists on sex assigned at birth, gender identity, and sexual orientation identity, and designed the survey to gather data about experiences of harassment and discrimination in various types of employment settings.

The survey provided valuable insights into the experiences of LGBT individuals in the U.S. workforce. For example, more than one in four (29.8%) LGBT employees experienced at least one form of employment discrimination during their lifetime due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, and more than one-third (37.7%) experienced harassment due to the same reasons.⁶

Ipsos and Global LGBTQI+ data

Public attitudes can form the basis of public policies, whether positive or negative. Understanding public attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people can help shape inclusive policies by shedding light on sources of stigma or other discriminatory beliefs.

In 2018, the Williams Institute collaborated with Ipsos, a global market research and polling firm, on a global survey of attitudes toward transgender people and their rights. Using Ipsos's monthly Global Advisor survey vehicle, a sample of 19,747 adults aged 18-64 were polled online across 16 countries. The Williams Institute developed the questionnaire, and Ipsos leveraged its pool of respondents and identified countries with sufficiently high internet penetration to ensure a nationally representative sample was captured.⁷

The collaboration with Ipsos resulted in valuable insights into public attitudes toward transgender individuals. Among key findings from the study, 60% of respondents around the world wanted their countries to do more to support and protect transgender people, and 70% agreed that transgender people should be protected against discrimination.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Most governments do not systematically collect population-level data on LGBTQI+ people. This gap results in a lack of robust evidence to inform policies and programs that target the specific needs of sexual and gender minorities within countries while also making it more difficult to compare progress and successful policies across countries.

The Williams Institute actively provides technical assistance to government agencies, domestically and internationally, to 1) incorporate SOGIESC measures into existing data collection efforts and 2) ensure existing SOGIESC measures reflect current best practices. Opportunities to inform government agencies may vary depending upon local differences and specific needs within each country context, available resources, the level of LGBTQI+ acceptance, and political will among agencies.

<https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-workplace-discrimination/>.

⁶ Brad Sears et al., "LGBT People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment" (The Williams Institute, September 2021), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-workplace-discrimination/>, p. 2.

⁷ Ipsos, "Global Attitudes Toward Transgender People" (Ipsos, January 2018), https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-01/ipsos_report-transgender_global_data-2018.pdf.

SOGIESC Measures in US Federal Data Collections

While some parts of the U.S. government collect SOGIESC data, it is not mandated across federal agencies. As part of its sustained plea for SOGIESC inclusion in federal data collection, the Williams Institute provided input to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy on the development of a Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity.⁸ Among several points raised, the Institute 1) provided evidence on why disparities faced by LGBTQI+ individuals could be better understood through Federal statistics and data collection; 2) identified specific data collections that should include SOGIESC data; 3) recommended further research on best practices to gather data about intersex people; and 4) offered recommendations to communicate methodological constraints to collecting and publishing SOGIESC data, such as limitations on sample size or decision-making around the use of particular survey questions.

In 2023, the Biden Administration released a Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity. The Evidence Agenda identifies priority gaps where SOGIESC data could be leveraged to inform programs and policies.⁹ It also includes guidelines for collecting SOGIESC data on survey and administrative forms, as well as a learning agenda through which expanded SOGIESC data collection can help illuminate particular gaps, disparities, and opportunities to support LGBTQI+ people across the work of federal agencies. Over time, the Evidence Agenda can help build the capacity and expertise within the federal government to collect this critical data.

California Health Interview Survey

As further research is conducted on best practices to gather SOGIESC data, new measures and survey questions are adopted and should be integrated into existing data collections. Researchers from academia and civil society can provide guidance to government agencies to ensure that SOGIESC data collection reflects updated best practices.

In 2015, the Williams Institute partnered with the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) to incorporate SOGI measures into this survey conducted jointly by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the California Department of Public Health, and the Department of Health Care Services. CHIS is the largest state health survey in the nation, interviewing a representative sample of more than 20,000 adults, teenagers, and children in California across all 58 counties. Williams Institute scholars have participated in a working group to refine SOGI question wording, improve comparability, and enhance response rates among LGBT people. In doing so, researchers ensure that accurate and reliable health-specific data about LGBT people are collected for analysis.¹⁰ For example, a recent study based on CHIS data from 2015-2020 found that lesbians, gay men, and bisexual women and men were more likely than heterosexual people to experience barriers in accessing health care.¹¹ As a comprehensive health survey,

⁸ Kerith J. Conron et al., "Request for Information; Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity (RIN 2022-18219)" (The Williams Institute, October 3, 2022), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Comment-OTSP-Research-Oct-2022.pdf>.

⁹ Subcommittee on SOGI Data and Subcommittee on Equitable Data, "Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity" (Washington, D.C.: National Science and Technology Council, January 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Federal-Evidence-Agenda-on-LGBTQI-Equity.pdf>.

¹⁰ CHIS SOGI Working Group. 2018. "California Health Interview Survey Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Working Group. Summary and Final Recommendations." CHIS 2019-2020 SOGI Working Group. <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/2019-20wk/Documents/CHIS%202019%20SOGI%20Work%20Group%20Summary%20and%20Recommendations%2020180629.pdf>.

¹¹ Susan H. Babey et al., "Gaps in Health Care Access and Health Insurance Among LGBT Populations in California" (The Williams Institute, February 2022), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/gaps-health-care-lgbt-ca/>.

the CHIS also collects data about SOGI in relation to a variety of factors, including family formation, HIV/AIDS, and violence, offering models that can be adapted to other data collection systems as well.

Supplementing Government Agency Data

In many cases, government agencies do not collect or have limited SOGIESC data. To address these gaps, researchers can collaborate with government entities to generate original SOGI data that supplement existing data collection systems. In 2016, the Williams Institute partnered with the LA LGBT Center, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (LA-DCFS), the Department of Mental Health, and more than 20 foster care provider agencies and community organizations to design and implement the Los Angeles Foster Youth Survey (LAFYS). The LAFYS was a telephone interview study with 786 randomly sampled youth ages 12-21 living in foster care in Los Angeles County. The project aimed to understand whether LGBTQ youth are overrepresented in the foster care system and what unique challenges they face compared to non-LGBTQ youth.

To inform the telephone survey, the research team first conducted background studies, including the examination of 40 child welfare cases from administrative records and convening an expert roundtable to identify risk factors that might impact SOGI data collection. The research team then developed a questionnaire, drawing upon best practices in SOGI measurement and garnering approval from the UCLA internal review board, the Dependency Court, and the LA-DCFS, with additional feedback from community organizations, groups of caregivers, and child welfare staff. This collaboration ensured that the questionnaire items and survey methodology were understandable, relevant, and not distressing to LGBTQ youth participants.

The LAFYS generated two reports that exemplify how supplementing current government surveillance tools can create richer data sets. The first report presented the study findings, showing that LGBTQ youth had a higher average number of foster care placements, were more likely to be living in a group home, were treated less well by the child welfare system, were more likely to have been hospitalized for emotional reasons at some point in their lifetime, and were more likely to have been homeless at some point in their life.¹² The second report, a methodology resource, detailed approaches for adding sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression measures to existing internal research and evaluation efforts or administrative records that scholars and government agencies could replicate.¹³

While the LAFYS was initially seen as a more affordable data collection alternative than overhauling a government administrative data system, it was not cost-effective in the long run, given that it only provided estimates based on a sample of study participants. Instead, it underscored the importance for stakeholders, especially government officials, to collect population-level data on LGBTQ youth in foster care using efficient, confidential, and accurate administrative data systems.

¹² Bianca D.M. Wilson et al., “Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: Assessing Disproportionality and Disparities in Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, August 2014), 6, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/SGM-Youth-in-Foster-Care-Aug-2014.pdf>.

¹³ Bianca D M Wilson et al., “Surveying LGBT Youth in Foster Care: Lessons from Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: The Williams Institute, November 2016), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Surveying-LGBTQ-Youth-Foster-Care-Nov-2016.pdf>.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND NETWORKS

Individual researchers and civil society organizations (CSOs) with ties to the LGBTQI+ community often work to fill data gaps when governments do not collect or inaccurately record SOGIESC data. Collaborations between researchers and CSOs can generate innovative and effective ways of increasing data collection on the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ people. Community-based organizations bring deep knowledge of and connections to the LGBTQI+ population that can strengthen data collection efforts by enhancing participation rates and ensuring cultural sensitivity.

The Williams Institute collaborates with CSOs in many ways. Scholars often offer technical assistance on research design, sampling strategies, data analysis, and dissemination of findings. At the same time, we learn from our community partners about the unique characteristics of local LGBTQI+ communities, previous efforts in data collection around SOGIESC, and cultural sensitivities that must be considered before implementing data collection projects.

Collaboration on the US Transgender Survey (USTS)

The Williams Institute serves as a collaborator on the U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS), the largest national online survey of transgender adults.¹⁴ Working with the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), the Williams Institute provides technical assistance in questionnaire development, data analysis, and weighting procedures, helping to ensure rigorous data collection practices.

In the absence of federal government data collection efforts, the collaboration has yielded invaluable insights into the lives of transgender individuals. Additionally, since this survey is tailored to understand the experiences of transgender people, it is able to bring to light experiences unique to the transgender population. The 2015 survey reached over 27,000 respondents, uncovering patterns of discrimination, economic vulnerability, and mental health challenges. Data have provided evidence for advocates, researchers, and policymakers alike to better inform policies and interventions that address violence, economic instability, and mental health disparities among transgender persons in the U.S.

Collaboration with Nepal's Blue Diamond Society

In 2013, the Williams Institute partnered with Nepal's Blue Diamond Society to conduct a survey of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal.¹⁵ The 2011 Nepal census introduced a "third gender" category, but lack of training for enumerators and confusion around the meaning of the category resulted in a substantial undercount of sexual and gender minorities in the country. The 2013 survey aimed to fill this gap and develop best practices for data collection that could serve as a model for more accurate data collection about sexual and gender minorities in Nepal moving forward.

The Williams Institute provided technical expertise on developing SOGI measures and sampling strategies. Blue Diamond Society likewise advised on the design of survey questions that accurately reflect and include sexual and

¹⁴ Sandy E. James et al., "The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey," December 2016, <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>.

¹⁵ UNDP and The Williams Institute, "Surveying Nepal's Sexual and Gender Minorities: An Inclusive Approach" (Bangkok: UNDP, 2014), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Nepal-SGM-Mar-2014.pdf>, p. 71.

gender minorities in Nepal, in addition to leading on survey administration. Both teams contributed to data analysis and compiling the final report.

While the sample of nearly 1,200 respondents was not probability-based, it provided a deeper understanding of this diversity in gender expressions that exists in Nepal. For example, the study found that more than half of people in the sample self-identified with multiple gender identities that were not adequately captured by the “third gender” category, suggesting the need for more refined gender categories. The study also provided insights for policymakers by highlighting disparities and gaps among sexual and gender minorities. For instance, despite a government directive allowing citizenship documents to reflect three genders, 92% of respondents had yet to change their gender on official documents or had experienced difficulties doing so.

As part of the 2021 census process in Nepal, representatives from Blue Diamond Society participated in a dialogue with government officials, echoing findings from the 2013 survey on the need to include questions that more accurately reflect the sexual and gender diversity of respondents.¹⁶ While the census ultimately included a category for “others,” research findings continue to offer a tool for advocacy around the need for more representative categories.¹⁷

IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTIVE EFFORTS FOR SOGIESC DATA COLLECTION

Effective data collection on SOGIESC is crucial for informed policymaking and program development that address the diverse needs and challenges faced by LGBTQI+ people. This brief highlighted several barriers to SOGIESC data collection and discussed collaborative strategies that demonstrate promising approaches to strengthening SOGIESC data collection efforts. It is important to note that data collection regarding people with intersex traits remains exceedingly rare in practice. Future research collaborations should specifically explore efforts to integrate measures of variations of sex characteristics into data collection.

Partnerships with private firms such as Gallup, Morning Consult, and Ipsos have proven successful in leveraging their respective expertise and resources to design comprehensive surveys, gather diverse samples, and analyze data on SOGIESC. Collaborations with government agencies like the California Health Interview Survey have resulted in the integration of SOGIESC measures into existing data collection efforts, providing valuable insights into disparities and informing evidence-based policy development. Additionally, collaborations with civil society organizations and community-based networks, exemplified by initiatives like the USTS and Nepal’s Blue Diamond Society, have filled critical gaps in data collection where official government initiatives may fall short.

These collaborations enable the collection of accurate, representative, and nuanced data. By adopting these collaborative strategies and fostering partnerships between research institutions, private entities, government agencies, and civil society organizations, policymakers, researchers, and activists can enhance their understanding of SOGIESC issues and more effectively target policies and interventions.

¹⁶ Aakriti Ghimire, “Main Census Questionnaire Does Not Recognise Queer People,” November 16, 2021, <http://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/11/16/main-census-questionnaire-does-not-recognise-queer-people>.

¹⁷ Anam Abbas, Sharu Joshi, and Rita Thapa, “Nepal Takes Steps to Include LGBTIQ Persons in 2021 Population Census,” UN Women Asia Pacific, October 30, 2019, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2019/10/nepal-takes-steps-to-include-lgbtiq-persons-in-2021-population-census>; Al Jazeera, “Nepal Introduces ‘Others’ Gender Category in Latest Census,” Al Jazeera, September 29, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/29/nepal-introduces-third-gender-category-in-latest-census>.

AUTHORS

Miguel Fuentes Carreño, Ph.D., is a Research Data Analyst at the Williams Institute.

Ari Shaw, Ph.D., is a Senior Fellow and Director of International Programs at the Williams Institute.

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For more information

The Williams Institute

UCLA School of Law

Phone: (310) 267-4382

Email: williamsinstitute@law.ucla.edu

Website: williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu