

The importance of increasing the visibility of gender identity in research

Paweł Larionow¹ , Monika Mazur² 

¹Faculty of Psychology, Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland

²Independent Researcher, 2500 Valby, Denmark

To the Editor

We are writing to highlight the importance of increasing the visibility of gender identity in research. Recent studies indicate a rise in people identifying as non-binary (i.e. not exclusively identifying as a woman or a man) [1], underlining that traditional binary gender categories may no longer be sufficient. This demographic shift highlights the necessity to reevaluate our data collection methods on gender identity. Therefore, including questions about gender identity in research instruments is an issue of inclusivity and can be crucial for gathering comprehensive data.

Gender-related topics remain understudied [2]. Currently, the data are missing because non-binary people are invisible in research. By including non-binary individuals, we can ensure they accurately represent the diversity of the examined populations. Consequently, it could lead to a better understanding of gender non-conforming people needs (e.g. well-being, mental health) [3]. Accurate assessment of gender identity is essential for providing appropriate healthcare equivalent to that provided for women and men.

One primary reason for including gender identity questions in research is their clinical relevance. Statistics consistently show that non-binary individuals face considerable mental health challenges. Mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, are more prevalent among non-binary populations compared to their cisgender peers. For instance, Polish studies demonstrate that non-binary people are very high-risk groups for psychopathology and low well-

-being [4, 5]. Additionally, non-binary individuals tend to encounter barriers to accessing healthcare (i.e. prejudices, gender stereotypes) [6]. Including non-binary individuals in statistical analysis especially when providing large-scale studies would be helpful to gain better visibility of non-binary experiences and to develop more inclusive mental health support systems.

To address these gaps, we believe that it is advantageous to incorporate non-binary and other gender identities in research. Surveys and research tools should allow respondents to self-identify their gender beyond the traditional binary categories. This approach could involve, for instance, open-ended questions or additional categories like "non-binary", "gender-queer", and "other (please specify)". Researchers mention an inclusive "two-step" gender/sex measurement practice. It consists of asking separate questions about the participant's sex assigned at birth and their current gender [1]. Furthermore, updating journal guidelines to encourage the inclusion of gender identity questions in research studies could raise awareness among researchers and help ensure that future studies capture the experiences of non-binary individuals. Also, providing a Polish-language guide of gender diversity issues for researchers and clinicians could be highly beneficial. In Table 1, we have summarised the indicated challenges, solutions, as well as possible outcomes laconically.

Finally, we believe that this simple solution, including gender-identity-related questions in research, will lead to beneficial outcomes for all involved parties (i.e. study participants, researchers, and medical care providers). The short-term outcomes could be more accurate statistics and the promotion of empathetic and inclusive language used by medical practitioners. This last element could lead to building a stronger therapeutic alliance [7]. In the long term, the accumulated data

Address for correspondence: Paweł Larionow, Faculty of Psychology, Kazimierz Wielki University, ul. Leopolda Staffa 1, 85-064 Bydgoszcz, Poland
 e-mail: pavel@ukw.edu.pl

Received: 28.06.2024 Accepted: 11.09.2024 Published: 26.09.2024
 Journal of Sexual and Mental Health 2024, 22: 50–51.

Table 1. Challenges, solutions, and outcomes related to gender identity visibility in research

Challenge	Solution	Outcome
Lack of accurate data on non-binary populations	Incorporate gender identity questions in research instruments	Better visibility of non-binary experiences
Lack of awareness and inclusivity in research practices	Update journal guidelines to include gender identity questions	Extensive research data leading to better-informed policies and practices
Lack of understanding of unique challenges of non-binary individuals, and their needs	Providing a Polish-language guide of gender diversity issues for researchers and clinicians	Increased knowledge and sensitivity among Polish-speaking researchers and clinicians leading to improved healthcare, research, and support services

could be helpful in the development of inclusive policies and programs that better serve non-binary individuals. We would like to believe that other researchers and clinicians will recognise the indicated solutions and incorporate them in real life practice.

Sincerely,
Paweł Larionow and Monika Mazur

Article information and declarations

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

References

- Schudson ZC, Morgenroth T. Non-binary gender/sex identities. *Curr Opin Psychol.* 2022; 48: 101499, doi: [10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101499](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101499), indexed in Pubmed: [36401906](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36401906/).
- Reisner SL, Katz-Wise SL, Gordon AR, et al. Social epidemiology of depression and anxiety by gender identity. *J Adolesc Health.* 2016; 59(2): 203–208, doi: [10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.04.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.04.006), indexed in Pubmed: [27267142](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27267142/).
- Koziara K, Mijas ME, Wycisk J, et al. Exploring health and transition-related needs in Polish transgender and non-binary individuals. *J Sex Med.* 2021; 18(6): 1110–1121, doi: [10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2021.04.001), indexed in Pubmed: [34108108](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34108108/).
- Larionow P. Anxiety and depression screening among Polish adults in 2023: depression levels are higher than in cancer patients. *Psychiatria.* 2023, doi: [10.5603/psych.97199](https://doi.org/10.5603/psych.97199).
- Larionow P, Mudto-Głagolska KK. The Patient Health Questionnaire–4: factor structure, measurement invariance, latent profile analysis of anxiety and depressive symptoms and screening results in Polish adults. *Adv Cogn Psychol.* 2023; 19(2): 123–137, doi: [10.5709/acp-0391-2](https://doi.org/10.5709/acp-0391-2).
- Skrzypczak E, Bilarzewska J, Niebudek A. Experiences of transgender people in using health care services. *J Sex Ment Health.* 2022; 20(0): 23–30, doi: [10.5603/jsmh.2022.0002](https://doi.org/10.5603/jsmh.2022.0002).
- Matsuno E. Nonbinary-affirming psychological interventions. *Cogn Behav Pract.* 2019; 26(4): 617–628, doi: [10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.09.003).