



# Gender equality and gender equity in health

**Sarah Payne**

School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol

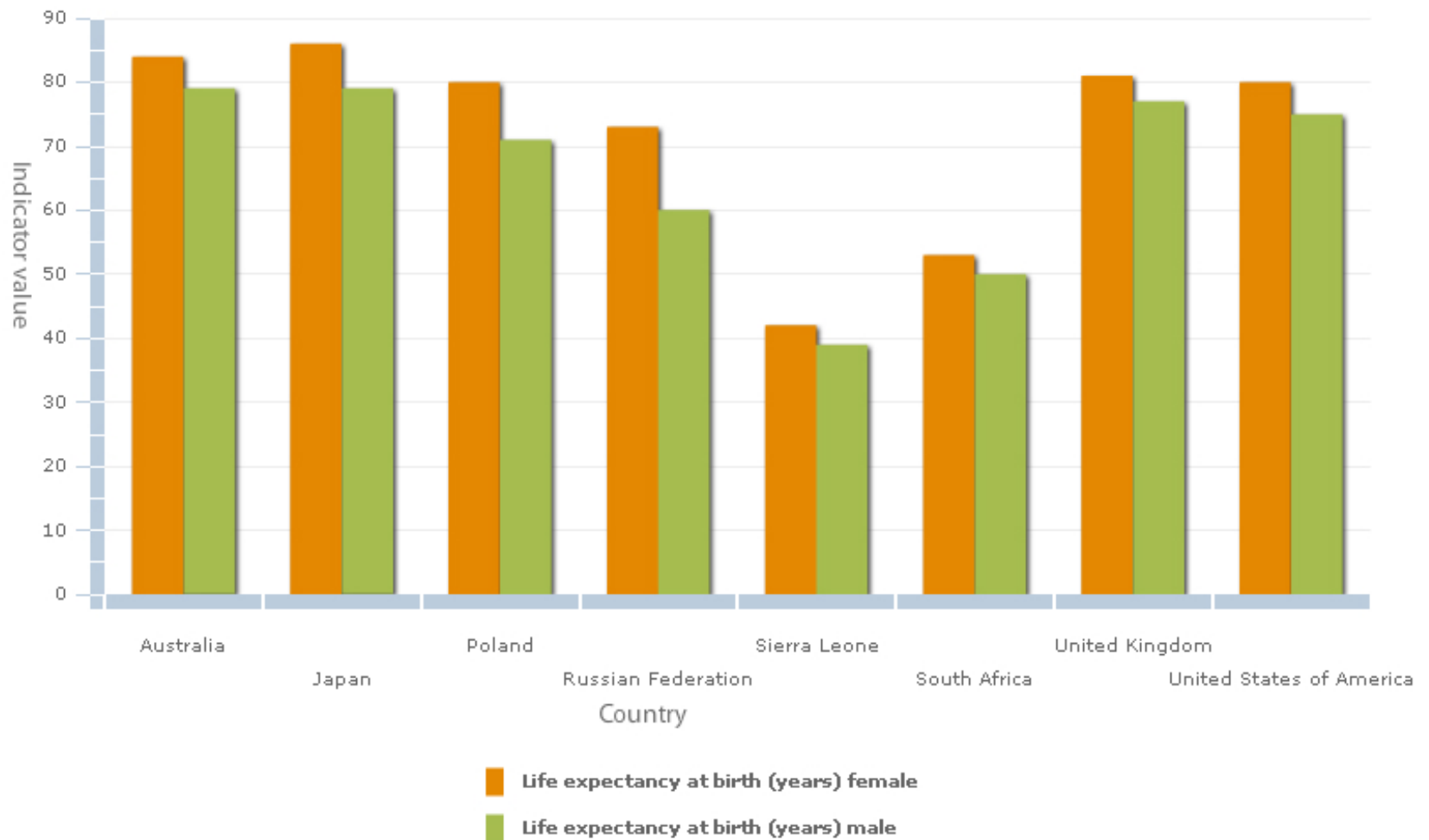


# ✦ Some of the differences between men and women ...

- Women have greater life expectancy in virtually every country
- Similar patterns of mortality in terms of overall causes but differences in specific conditions and age
- Patterns of morbidity more complex



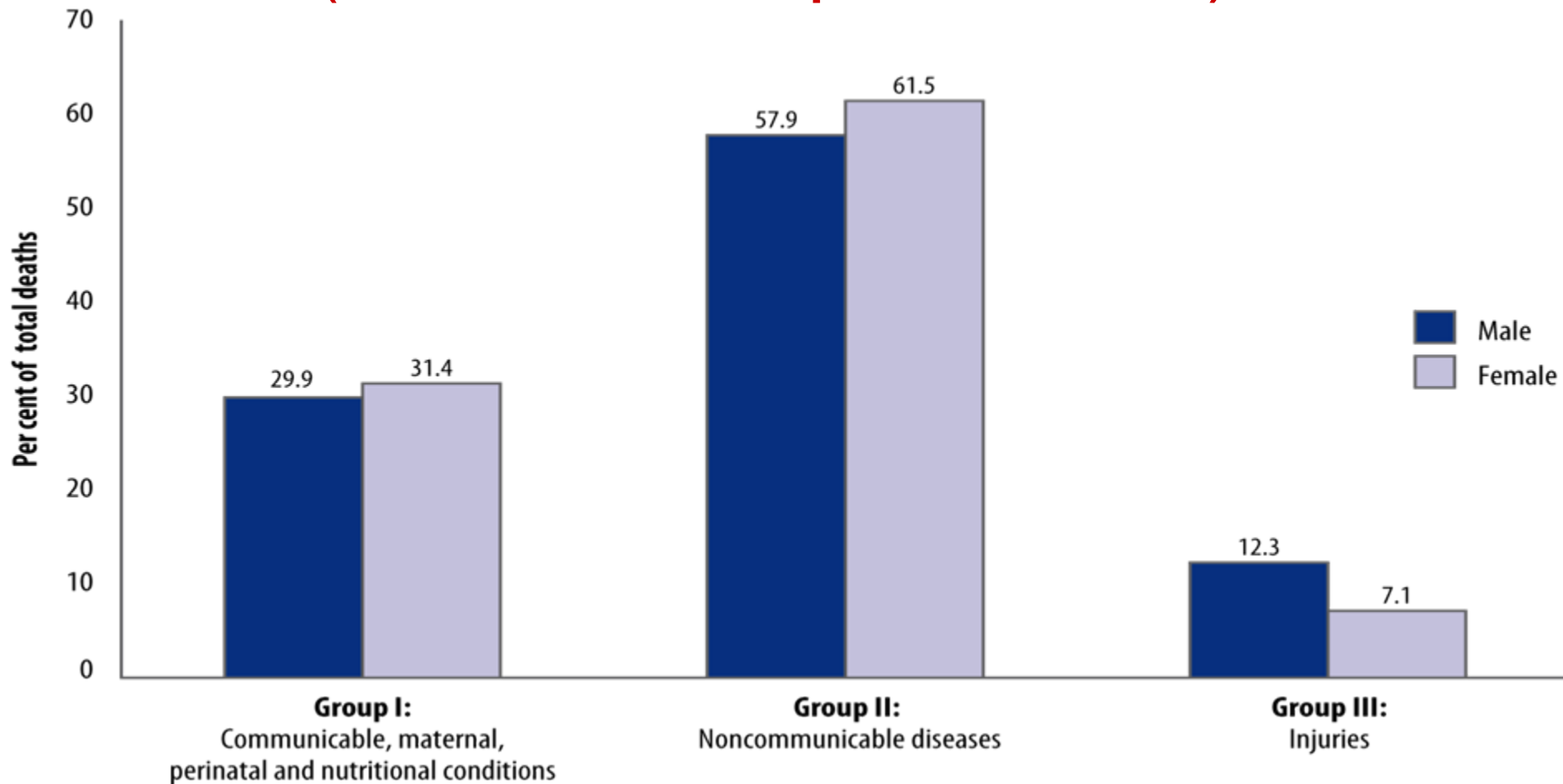
## Latest Available Indicator Country Column Chart



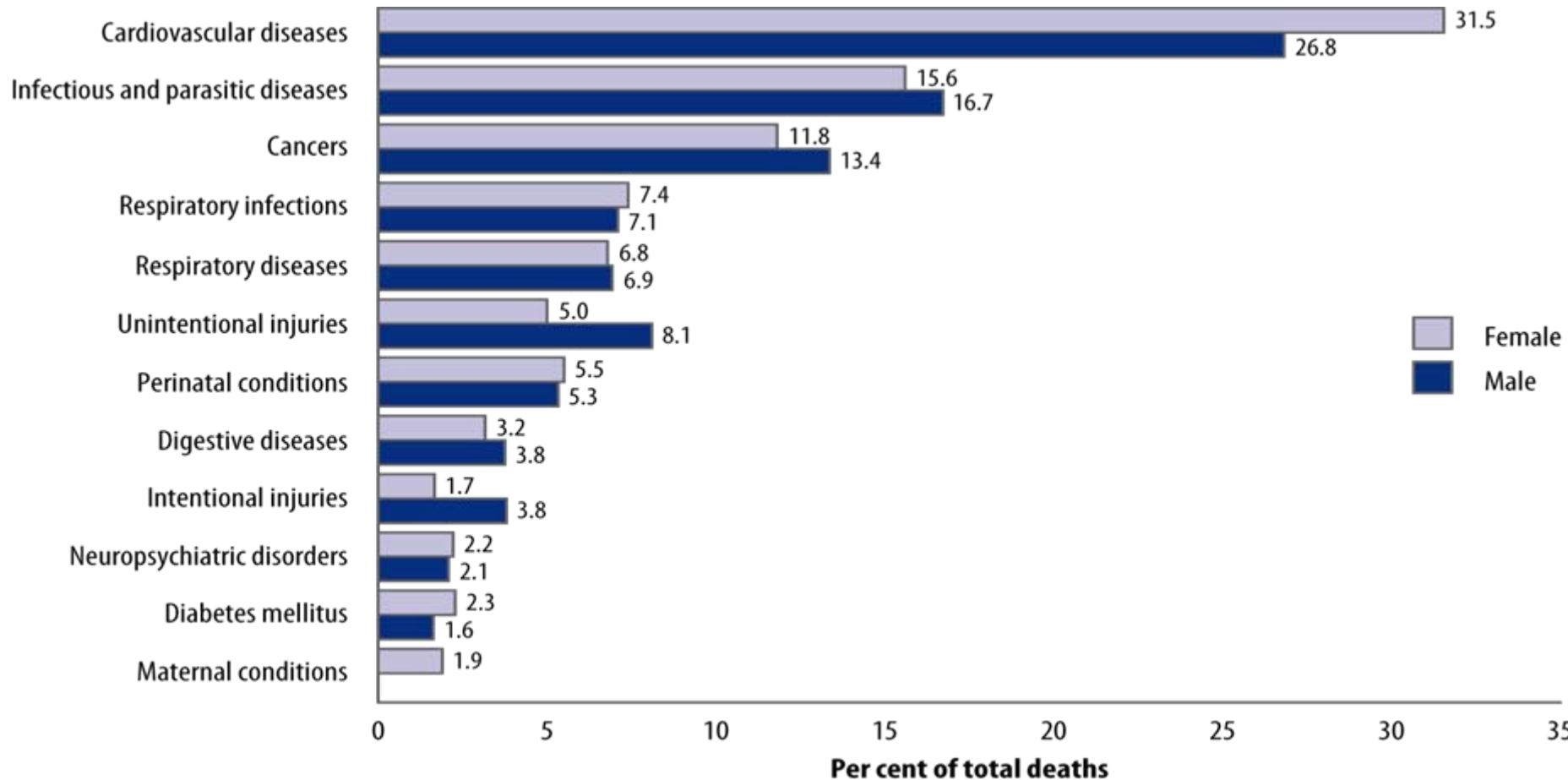
[© World Health Organization.](#)

The information in this database is provided as a service to our users. The responsibility for the interpretation and use of the material lies with the user. In no event shall the World Health Organization be liable for any damages arising from the use of the information linked to in this section. For explanatory notes, please refer to the latest version of the World Health Statistics publication available at <http://www.who.int/whosis/>.

# ✦ Distribution of deaths by sex, 2004 (WHO GBD Update 2004)



# 👉 Distribution of deaths by sex and leading cause, 2004



# Sex and gender:

- **Sex:** refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women
- **Gender:** refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women



# Sex influences on health:

- Risk or vulnerability to specific conditions as a result of various reproductive, genetic, hormonal influences
- Increasing evidence about importance of sex-linked influences



# Gender influences on health

- Gender differences in access to resources, differences in paid and unpaid work, health behaviours and risks

## **PLUS**

- Gender differences in how well health policy and health care meet the needs of women and men



# Key differences in services

- Women more likely than men to consult primary physicians
  - “A real man puts up with pain and doesn’t complain”  
(Male respondent in O’Brien et al, 2005)
- More women use preventive care
- Gender differences in awareness of symptoms
- Men under-diagnosed with some conditions e.g. depression
- But with other conditions, men more often referred by primary physicians to specialist services



# The role of health systems in addressing gender inequality

- Many factors shaping gender based inequalities are beyond scope of health system
- Potential to make a difference:
  - Barriers to care
  - Gender sensitive treatment within services
  - Health literacy
  - ‘Voice’ – shaping discourse
  - Reducing gender inequalities among workforce



# Approaches to the promotion of gender equality in health

- Legislative change
- Gender mainstreaming
- Organisational approaches
- Information and data



# Gender mainstreaming

- “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes ...to achieve gender equality.”  
(United Nations 1997, 27)
- Approach adopted by WHO, UN, EU, World Bank



# ✦ Gender mainstreaming health policy:

- Identify gender differences in health experience, needs, access to services, barriers to access
- Every stage:
  - Policy development
  - Implementation
  - Monitoring and evaluation
  - Training and education



# Organisational approaches

- Gender budgets
  - Gender based assessment of expenditure and outcomes
  - ‘just good budgeting’
- Gender specific health outcome targets
  - Identify specific targets for men and women



# Health information

- Gender disaggregated data essential
- Need for data at all levels from international, national, regional and local
- Data on need as well as service use
- Has to be disaggregated by other aspects of difference
- Involve stakeholders in development of data



# Equity or equality?

- Goal of gendered strategies?
- Equality = absence of discrimination
- Equity takes into account underlying *differences* in access to resources, roles, responsibilities
- Goal is therefore maximising opportunities for health ...
- Not equality of outcome



# Conclusion

- Health systems have key role:
  - Promoting access
  - Delivering gender sensitive care
  - Improving health literacy
  - Shaping gender equality agenda
- Good quality information essential



**Wilkins, D., Payne, S., Granville, G and  
Branney, P (2008) “The gender and access to  
health services study: final report”  
Department of Health**

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics  
/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH  
\\_092042](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_092042)

**Payne, S. (2009) How can gender equity be  
addressed through health systems? World  
Health Organisation Europe Policy Brief 12**

<http://www.euro.who.int/document/E92846.pdf>

