

Guessing Gender Based Upon Forename

Careful! It's risky!

Two classic examples come to mind, **Jesse/Jessie** and **Francis/Frances**. Pretty simple... both are males. Right? Not so fast!

Using the Search function at FamilySearch¹ and searching for Forename = Jessie in the 1881 England and Wales Census reveals 36,645 individuals:

Search Results from Historical Records			
1-20 of 36,645 results for Name: jessie , Event: Residence , Place: england , Event Range: 1881-1881 , Record Type: Census, Residence & Lists			
Number of results to show: <input type="text" value="20"/> <input type="text" value="50"/> <input type="text" value="75"/>			
Preview	Name	Events	Relationships
▶	Jessie Abbercrombie Head England and Wales Census, 1881	birth: 1839 East Indies residence: 1881 Paddington, London, Middlesex, England	children: Madeline Abbercrombie, Elizabeth Abbercrombie, Catherine Abbercrombie other: Edward Williams, Catherine Abercrombie, Sarah A Birt, Annie E Coxall, Elizabeth Chatterley, Jane A James...
▶	Jessie Abbott Boarder England and Wales Census, 1881	birth: 1865 Faversham, Kent, England residence: 1881 Paddington, London, Middlesex, England	

Further Filtering by Gender reveals:

FILTER YOUR RESULTS BY:
[Learn more](#)

Collections ▶

Birthplace ▶

Birth Year ▶

Residence Place ▶

Residence Year ▶

Gender ▶

Daughter
England and Wales

▶ [Jessie Adams](#)
Daughter
England and Wales

Female (34,490)
Male (2,169)
Unknown (3)

So, while only about 6% are males that's still significant enough that one would certainly not want to make an **assumption**!

¹

[https://familysearch.org/search/record/results?count=20&query=%2Bgivenname%3Ajessie%20%2Bresidence_place%3Aengland%20%2Bresidence_year%3A1881-1881~%20%2Brecord_type%3A\(3\)](https://familysearch.org/search/record/results?count=20&query=%2Bgivenname%3Ajessie%20%2Bresidence_place%3Aengland%20%2Bresidence_year%3A1881-1881~%20%2Brecord_type%3A(3))

But, what if the “correct” spelling is **Jesse**? Again using the Search function at FamilySearch and searching for Forename = Jesse in the 1881 England and Wales Census reveals 15,663 individuals²:

Search Results from Historical Records			
1-20 of 15,663 results for Name: Jesse , Event: Residence , Place: england , Event Range: 1881-1881 , Record Type: Census, Residence & Lists			
Number of results to show: <input type="button" value="20"/> <input type="button" value="50"/> <input type="button" value="75"/>			
Preview	Name	Events	Relationships
▶	Jesse Abrahams Son England and Wales Census, 1881	birth: 1873 London City Of, London, Middlesex, England residence: 1881 Islington, London, Middlesex, England	father: Elias Abrahams mother: Rosetta Abrahams other: Thomas Abrahams, Henry Abrahams, Priscilla Abrahams, Carry Abrahams, Lizzie Abrahams, Marcus Abrahams
▶	Jesse Adams Daughter England and Wales Census, 1881	birth: 1880 Hackney, Middlesex, England residence: 1881 Hackney, London, Middlesex, England	father: George Adams mother: Emma Adams other: Elizabeth Adams, George Adams, Annie Adams, Charlotte Adams, Estha Adams, Henry Adams...

A similar Filter by Gender reveals:

The screenshot shows the FamilySearch search interface with a list of filters on the left: Birthplace, Birth Year, Residence Place, Residence Year, and Gender. The 'Gender' filter is highlighted in green. A pop-up window displays the results for the 'Gender' filter: Female (1,699) and Male (13,970). The background shows search results for 'Jesse Abrahams' from the 1881 England and Wales Census.

For this spelling then Females are about 11%. Once again a large enough minority that one would not want to make an assumption!

An examination of **Francis** and **Frances** in the same 1881 Census of England and Wales reveals:

FORENAME	TOTAL	FEMALE	MALE	UNKNOWN
FRANCIS	58,812	9,237	49,598	2
FRANCES	59,444	56,959	2,501	1

The messages are clear to this author **“Do not make an assumption of Gender based upon a particular Forename”** and **“Validate the ‘correct’ spelling of the Forename”**. For the latter you may need to use The Genealogical Proof Standard as suggested by the Board for Certification of Genealogists³

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³ <http://www.bcgcertification.org/resources/standard.html>