

Webinar 2: An Update on Gender Informed Practice

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Sex and gender are among the most influential determinants of health and both are key to developing effective substance use programs and policies. *Sex-informed* approaches consider how anatomy, physiology, genes, hormones and neurobiology affect the ways that bodies respond to various substances and influence treatment approaches. *Gender-informed* approaches consider how factors such as family relationships, social connections and gender identity affect individual experiences of substance use, the relevance of different treatment approaches, and an individual's ability to access care and treatment.

Examples:

- Canada's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines – different guidelines for men and women due to biological differences in how men's and women's bodies break down alcohol
- Trends in substance use (1) more men are dying from opioid overdoses (2) cannabis use is almost double in men vs women (13.9% vs. 7.4%) (3) alcohol use in young women is higher than any other group
- Gender relations and tobacco use during pregnancy – resource: *Couples and Smoking* available from <http://facet.ubc.ca>

Sex and gender are fluid categories and the gender binary is increasingly being questioned, rejected, or expanded. Sex and gender are cultural and temporal, e.g., cultural definitions of gender such as two-spirited, hijra, and gender questioning; shifting attitudes to LGBTQ+ individuals in some cultures; gender as transitioning – self-initiated, surgical or hormonal, social, legal, and biological.

Examples of gender-informed treatment resources:

- Substance Use and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the United States has developed treatment guidelines for men and women (TIP 51 and TIP 56) - www.samhsa.gov
- Stephanie S. Covington, *Helping Women Recover* program – evaluations show decreases in depression, fewer substances used, more positive perception of treatment, reduced PTSD. *Exploring Trauma: A Brief Intervention for Men* program – piloted in substance use settings with positive reception - www.stephaniecovington.com
- Peer support models, e.g., 16 Steps for Recovery and Empowerment tailored for women (Charlotte Kasl)

How do sex and gender matter in the substance use field?

1. **Mechanisms.** Differences in biological responses to drugs.
2. **Consequences and Impacts.** Socio-economic and legal consequences of drug problems, including employment, poverty, homelessness, gang activities, drug trafficking, sexual assault, gender-based violence
3. **Prevention.** Differences in pathways, protective and risk factors, progression, transition and maintenance
4. **Treatment.** Differences in access, readiness, retention, and outcomes
5. **Reproduction/Fertility/Parenting.** Differing roles, biological concerns, social stigma, child custody

Source: www.addictionsresearchtraining.ca

- Resource: Prism is Vancouver Coastal Health’s education, information and referral service for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, Two-Spirit and queer + (LGBT2Q+) communities. Provides training for service providers on inclusion, diversity and promoting health and wellness for the LGBT2Q+ communities.

Gender-transformative approaches actively strive to examine, question, and change rigid gender norms and imbalances of power as a means of reaching health as well as gender equity objectives. In the context of substance use responses, gender transformative initiatives seek to not only address the issue of substance use, but at the same time transform and improve gender and health equity.

- Awareness campaigns that encourage women to quit smoking due to concerns about their appearance or that suggest that “real men” don’t smoke are “gender exploitive” as they reinforce gender stereotypes
- An FASD prevention campaign that acknowledges different roles for men and women and involve men in change – “Healthy babies need everyone’s support. Alcohol and pregnancy don’t mix” – is “gender transformative” as it addresses gender relations
- Free online training on gender transformation health promotion - <https://promotinghealthinwomen.ca/>

The integration of trauma-informed and gender-informed and gender-transformative practices builds upon existing best practices and emerging research and practice change.

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