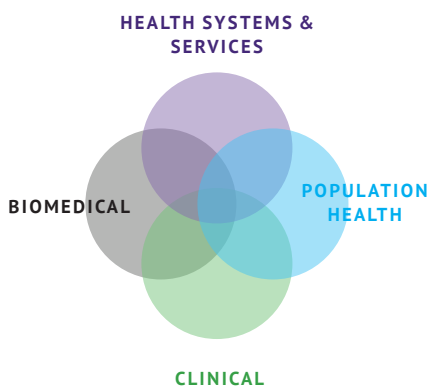


Transdisciplinarity and Addiction

Addiction is a complex health problem that involves factors spanning the social and the biological. While many lenses, disciplines and sectors are applied to research and treatment of addiction, rarely do these diverse perspectives combine to create shared approaches to research and treatment. These silos are felt in the separation of addiction and mental health services, failure to integrate sex and gender into research, treatment and policy and lack of timely knowledge translation from research to treatment. Moving from unidisciplinary and siloed approaches towards transdisciplinary approaches, that include the perspectives of those affected by addiction, can produce more appropriate, effective and humane solutions to addiction.



What is transdisciplinarity?

Transdisciplinarity begins from the recognition that approaches to health issues are most effective when those engaged with the issue, “transcend disciplinary bounds to synthesize knowledge about the problem in the quest to understand it fully as a complex dynamic system”.¹ It involves “blurring boundaries” between disciplines towards the innovation of conceptual and methodological frameworks that ultimately yield a deeper understanding of the problem being studied.² Whereas unidisciplinarity involves no collaboration and multi- and interdisciplinarity involve some collaboration but with hierarchies, transdisciplinarity aims to transcend disciplinary boundaries to develop research projects, treatments and policies from a shared perspective, from the ground upwards.

Doing transdisciplinarity

Transdisciplinarity requires participants to be open to learning from other perspectives, to work towards a common language and to meld methods, frameworks, theories, evidence and approaches towards the development of new questions and solution.³ One of the key skills for developing transdisciplinary collaboration is communication. One example of a tool that can help foster transdisciplinary communication can be found in the template below, entitled *Guide for Developing Transdisciplinary Communication in Addictions Research*. This template was developed by the Intersections of Mental Health Perspectives in Addiction Research Training (IMPART) program created to support multi-disciplinary groups of addictions researchers and clinicians move towards transdisciplinarity, as well as integrate sex and gender and intersecting issues of mental health trauma and violence. While this template focuses on discussion of theory and methods in research, it can be adapted for any sectoral group such as clinical or policy discussions.



Additional Resources

IMPART online course
Defining addiction from
multiple perspectives Module :
www.impart.com/tutorials/

Greaves, L, N. Poole, E. Boyle (eds).
(2015) *Transforming Addiction:
gender, trauma transdisciplinarity*.
Routledge, New York



Guide for developing transdisciplinary communication in addictions research, treatment and policy

Identify 2 key discussion points:

Include as a group, 2 ideas that you collectively agree are most important for discussion of the designated topic, readings etc.

Identify 2 key Problems:

Identify as a group, 2 points that struck you as problematic; theories, ideas, practices that contradict your view of addiction & that you think are damaging to a field of research, or practice.

Relate theory to research or policy to practice:

How do the ideas under discussion relate to your individual area of research or practice? What ideas that are not a part of your practice would you seek to integrate into your work?

Bring in sex & gender:

As a group, decide how to bring the following into the discussion:

- Biological sex
- Sexuality
- Social gender identity/roles
- Gender/sex-based discrimination

Bring in intersections:

As a group, decide how to bring the following intersections into the discussion:

- Mental health
- Violence
- Trauma

What would your group add?

As a group, identify other information that should be included in future discussion of this topic:

- Reading(s)
- Links to internet resources, organizations
- New theories or frameworks

Exercise:

As a group, develop some activities for everyone to participate in. The goal of the exercise is to:

- Illustrate a concept
- Explore a controversy
- Instigate discussion or debate

Implications for:

Research: two or more disciplines can collaborate on an addiction based issue by melding knowledge, theory and methods as well as incorporating sex and or gender based analysis to capture social and biological aspects of addiction.

Treatment: general practitioners and clinicians of varying specialities can collaborate with one another as well as cross sectorally on developing practices, protocols and new research questions that take the complexity of addiction and related issues into account.

Health Policy: policy makers can collaborate with multi-disciplinary researchers, clinicians and those affected by addictions issues and their communities to develop policies that take into account the latest knowledge, sex and gender and intersecting factors that shape addictions.



References :

1. Johnson NA, Higginbotham N, and Briceno-Leon R. Best practice and future innovation in applying social science to advancing the health of population. In: Higginbotham N, Briceno-Leon R, Johnson, N, eds. Applying health social science: best practice in the developing world. London: Zed Books, 2002. 26.
2. Snow, MA, Salmon, A. and Young R. 2010. Teaching Transdisciplinarity in a Discipline-Centered World. Collected Essays on Learning and Teaching 3: 159-165.
3. Abrams, D. (2006) Applying transdisciplinarity research strategies to understanding and elimination health disparities. Health Education & Behavior, Vol. 33 (4): 515-531 DOI: 10.1177/1090198106287732