

Assessing the Impact of SGBA Plus Integration in the Canadian Health Portfolio

**by
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Ethics Statement

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or

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Abstract

This qualitative study delves into the tangible impact and challenges associated with the implementation of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) within Canada's Health Portfolio. Through in-depth key informant interviews, the research identifies six critical themes: leadership commitment, capacity building and training, integration into decision-making processes and policy mandates, focus on health equity and intersectionality, research-policy partnerships, and educational initiatives.

The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of advancing gender equity in health policy, revealing both progress and challenges. Despite notable strides, challenges such as resistance to change, resource constraints, organizational inertia, data limitations, and inadequate training hinder effective SGBA+ integration.

This study emphasizes the significance of advancing SGBA+ policies to address gender disparities and foster inclusivity within the healthcare system. It highlights the need for continued collaboration, adaptation, and evaluation to overcome challenges and fully realize the transformative potential of SGBA+ in promoting equity and improving health outcomes for all Canadians.

Keywords: Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+); Canada's Health Portfolio; Intersectionality; Health Equity; Health Policy

Dedication

Be considerate of others, never look down on anyone and remember, if we give a helping hand today we will receive one tomorrow when we need.

- Donna Tobin, 1998

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List of Acronyms

CIHR	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
EDI	Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
PHAC	Public Health Agency of Canada
SFU	Simon Fraser University
SGBA+	Sex and Gender Based Analysis Plus

Glossary

Disaggregated data	“Data that has been separated or broken down into smaller, more specific categories or groups” (Statistics Canada, 2023).
Equity	“The principle of considering people's unique experiences and differing situations, and ensuring they have access to the resources and opportunities that are necessary for them to attain just outcomes” (Government of Canada, 2022).
Gender identity	“A person's internal and deeply felt sense of being a man, a woman, both, neither, or somewhere along the gender spectrum” (Government of Canada, 2022).
Health equity	“Health equity refers to the absence of unfair and avoidable or remediable differences in health among population groups defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically” (Government of Canada, 2023).
Intersectionality	“An analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's identity (for example, sex, gender, age, ethnicity, class, religion, sexual orientation, ability) combine to create particular forms of discrimination and privilege” (Government of Canada, 2023).
Organizational inertia	“Resistance to change or reluctance to adopt new practices within an organization”

(Moradi, Jafari, Doorbash, and Mirzaei, 2021).

Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus

“An analytical approach that considers both biological (sex) and sociocultural (gender) factors, as well as other intersecting identities, in policy development, implementation, and evaluation” (Government of Canada, 2023).

Social determinants of health

“The social, economic, and environmental conditions in which people live and work, which influence their health and well-being” (World Health Organization, 2023).

Executive Summary

This project seeks to uncover firsthand experiences, perspectives, and examples of how the Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy has influenced decision-making, program development, resource allocation, and outcomes within the health portfolio. By utilizing qualitative research methods, specifically key informant interviews, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the practical implications of effectiveness of SGBA+ integration in shaping health policies. The study identifies six themes: leadership commitment; increased capacity building and training; incorporation into decision-making processes and policy mandates; focus on health equity, intersectionality, and community involvement; research-policy partnerships and integration into grant funding processes; and educational initiatives and enhanced considerations of gender in health policy.

The tangible changes resulting from Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) in Canada's Health Portfolio are multifaceted. Leadership commitment plays a pivotal role, with deputy heads championing gender equity and setting precedents for SGBA+ implementation. Increased capacity building and training equip Health Portfolio members with the skills and knowledge needed for gender-sensitive analyses. Incorporation into decision-making processes and policy mandates signals growing recognition of gender considerations in informing policy development and promoting equitable outcomes.

There's a focus on health equity, intersectionality, and community involvement, tailoring interventions to address unique challenges faced by different intersecting gender and social identities. Research-policy partnerships and integration into grant funding facilitate collaboration to translate research findings into actionable policy recommendations and promote gender equity in research and policy. Finally, educational initiatives and enhanced consideration of gender in health guidelines underscore investments into post-secondary education and updates to guidelines to foster a workforce sensitive to diverse gender needs.

To enhance the effectiveness of SGBA+ efforts, it is recommended to establish interdisciplinary collaboration platforms, fostering innovative solutions by bringing together diverse expertise. Ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness of SGBA+ initiatives

can be achieved through enhanced stakeholder engagement mechanisms. Prioritizing research to address data gaps is essential for informing gender-sensitive policy development, while integrating cultural competency training into health policy to address disparities. Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation processes is crucial to ensure accountability and continuous improvement in the Health Portfolio's SGBA+ Policy implementation.

Several challenges were presented through literature that hinder the seamless integration of the SGBA+ into health policy. Resistance to change, especially within entrenched organizational cultures, pose the most significant barrier. Resource constraints and organizational inertia also limit the scalability of SGBA+ initiatives. Additionally, data challenges, such as gaps in gender-specific health data, could impede evidence-informed decision-making and policy development. The literature also points out that inadequate training on SGBA+ principles and lack of cultural competency undermine the effectiveness of implementation efforts, highlighting the need for comprehensive training.

Overall, while the Health Portfolio's SGBA+ policy has led to positive changes, there are opportunities for improvement, particularly in addressing implementation challenges and advancing community-driver approaches to policy development and evaluation. Continued efforts are crucial for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusivity within Canada's Health Portfolio and future health policies.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Addressing Disparities in Health Policy: The Role of SGBA+

Traditional health policies typically focus on guiding decisions and actions to improve health outcomes at various levels (Ginter, Duncan, and Swayne, 2013). These policies encompass a wide range of measures, including legislation, regulations, guidelines, and initiatives aimed at addressing health issues, allocating resources, and shaping healthcare delivery systems. However, they often overlook the interconnectedness of various factors influencing health outcomes, leading to disparities, particularly regarding sex and gender considerations (Mikkonen and Raphael, 2010).

To address these challenges, initiatives such as Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) policy has emerged (Health Canada, 2023). Established in 2009, the SGBA+ policy has since been applied across various sectors within the health portfolio to ensure that policies and programs consider the diverse needs and experiences of different gender and sex. SGBA+ has been instrumental in addressing disparities in healthcare delivery, such as ensuring equitable access to preventative screenings and treatments for diseases that affect individuals differently based on sex and gender (Health Canada, 2023).

1.2. Defining SGBA+ Analysis

Scholars emphasize the importance of distinguishing between sex and gender in health analysis to establish clear lines between biological characteristics (sex) and socially constructed roles and norms (gender) (Kaufman, Eschliman, and Carver, 2023). However, challenges persist in practice, with sex and gender often treated as binaries, occasionally conflating in health data which impacts research and policy accuracy (Kaufman, Eschliman, and Carver, 2023). The ongoing confusion surrounding the definition and scope of SGBA+ is highlighted by Greaves and Ritz who note that it affects a policy's operationalization and implementation (2022).

Greaves and Ritz emphasize the critical role that SGBA+ plays in health policy due to its ability to provide precision in unraveling nuanced factors contributing to

disparities and understanding the specific needs of diverse populations (2022). Similarly, scholars like Hankivsky and Hunting (2021) highlight the evolving recognition of how gender inequities contribute to health inequities, leading to gender-transformative approaches in health. Integration of intersectionality through SGBA+ within the Canadian context is recognized as a positive step towards advancing sex and gender equality (Government of Canada, 2023).

Implementing Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) policies is not without its challenges as highlighted in the literature (Government of Canada, 2023). Common obstacles faced by policymakers and health professionals include; resistance to change, lack of resources, organizational inertia, data challenges, and inadequate training and capacity (Government of Canada, 2019; Canadian Institute of Health Research, 2019; Cooke et. Al., 2017).

Resistance to change is prevalent challenge faced during the implementation of SGBA+ policies (Government of Canada, 2023). While resistance is pronounced within the health sector due to its complexity, similar challenges arise in other policy areas where entrenched or interests hinder the adoption of new approaches. Women and Gender equity Canada assert that resistance stems from entrenched practices, organizational culture, and skepticism regarding SGBA+ relevance (2019).

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women cited that resource constraints pose significant barriers to the effective implementation of SGBA+ (2021). Limited funding, staffing shortages, and competing priorities impede efforts to allocate sufficient resources towards training, data collection, and policy development initiatives. Women and Gender Equality Canada highlight that organizational inertia hinders the successful implementation of SGBA+ (2019).

Data-related challenges, including limited availability of disaggregated data and inadequate data infrastructure, pose significant barriers to conducting meaningful Sex- and Gender-Based Analyses (Government of Canada, 2023). Addressing these challenges requires investments in data collection systems, capacity-building efforts, and collaboration with researcher insitiutions to improve data quality and accessibility. Cooke et al. states that if policymakers and health professionals are not equipped with the

necessary knowledge and skills to apply SGBA+ principles effectively, stakeholders struggle to integrate sex and gender considerations into their work (2017).

1.3. Uncovering the Impact of SGBA+ Policies

Greaves, Ritz, and others have identified challenges and barriers to implementing SGBA+, there is limited research examining the practical effectiveness of SGBA+ policies in reducing disparities and promoting health equity (2022). The gap in knowledge hinders Canada's ability to assess the overall impact of the SGBA+ policy.

To address this gap, the research question this report poses is: What tangible changes have resulted from Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy in Canada's Health Portfolio? This research aims to provide insights into the efficacy of efforts to promote health equity in Canada.

Chapter 2. Methodology

2.1. Study Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to delve into the perception of individuals responsible for implementing Canada's Health Portfolio's Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy regarding its tangible impact. The qualitative approach was chosen to facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the nuanced perspectives and experiences related to the policy's implementation and its resulting changes.

2.2. Key Informant Interviews

Thirteen one-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted online in real-time with key informants within the Health Portfolio. Synchronous online interviews facilitated immediate engagement between key informants and the interviewer. The semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide that was developed for this study, focusing on key topics related to the implementation and impact of the SGBA+ Policy within Canada's Health Portfolio (See Appendix A). Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in questioning while ensuring constant coverage of key topics. Key informants were chosen based on their expertise and involvement in policy development processes within the Health Portfolio, ensuring insights gained are from individuals with knowledge and experience.

Audio recording was consented to by 11 of 13 interviewees; quotes provided are summaries of the perspectives shared during the interviews. Transcription was conducted for those interviews with consent, accurately capturing all cues. In the two non-recorded interviews detailed notes were collected to ensure accurate retelling of their accounts and experiences. Transcripts served as the primary data source for analysis.

Inclusion criteria: Participants eligible for inclusion are health portfolio deputy heads and employees with at least five years of experience in roles directly related to health policy development or administration.

Exclusion criteria: Participants lacking a minimum of five years of relevant experience within the Health Portfolio were excluded due to insufficient expertise.

2.3. Ethical Considerations

This research project obtained approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of Simon Fraser University under protocol number 30002093, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and guidelines. All participants signed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their rights as research participants. Their voluntary participation and right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence was emphasized. The research protocol was reviewed by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) review committee to ensure alignment with government policies and regulations. This step ensured the ethical conduct of the research and adherence to relevant guidelines.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data from the key informant interviews, aiming to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships. Codes were manually applied to relevant segments of the transcripts to capture key ideas, concepts, and patterns, which were then grouped to develop overarching themes. Themes were constructed through iterative examination of the coded data segments, allowing for a deeper understanding of relationships between concepts and phenomena.

Chapter 3. Results

The key informant interviews conducted offer insights into the various facets of the Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy within the Canadian Health Portfolio. The results derived from these interviews highlight that tangible change created by the policy has manifested within: leadership commitment; increased capacity building, training, and accountability; Incorporation into decision-making processes and policy mandates; improved focus on health equity, intersectionality, and community involvement; research-policy partnerships and integration into grant funding processes; and educational initiatives and enhanced considerations of gender in health guidelines.

The results highlight the concerted efforts undertaken to foster a culture of inclusivity and equity within the Canadian Health Portfolio. From the active engagement of top leadership to the systematic incorporation of SGBA+ principles into policy frameworks and educational curricula, these findings illuminate a multifaceted approach dedicated to addressing gender disparities and advancing gender inclusivity across the Health Portfolio.

3.1. Leadership Commitment to Policy Integration

Key Informant 1 pointed to the active involvement of deputy heads in spearheading initiatives aimed at integrating Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy into development and decision-making processes. Key informants emphasized the pivotal role these leaders play in setting examples for their teams, demonstrating a hands-on approach to promoting sex and gender equity in policy formulation. This aligns with existing literature which champions leadership buy-in as a focal piece in successful policy implementation (Smith et al., 2020).

Key Informant 2 noted that there is a clear expectations across Health Portfolio departments and agencies to integrate SGBA+ into policy development, indicating a top-down commitment to gender equity. This institutionalize expectation underscores the Portfolio-wide commitment too incorporating sex and gender considerations into policy frameworks which Key Informant 1 and 2 highlighted. However, while this top-down

approach signals progress in advancing gender equity key informants agreed that challenges remain in translating these expectations into tangible outcomes.

Key Informant 3 emphasized the implementation mechanisms and processes to support SGBA+ integration as a facilitator of ongoing commitment and successful execution over time. Key informants highlighted the importance of establishing frameworks that embed gender analysis into policy development ensuring sustained progress towards gender equity goals. This finding resonates with previous researching emphasizing the need to institutionalize sex and gender analysis within policy frameworks to drive meaningful change (Hankvisky et al., 2014).

Efforts to integrate SGBA+ into research and publication practices were seen as critical, by Key Informants 5, 7, 8, and 9 for promoting evidence-based policy development and implementation. The key informants also noted that by incorporating sex and gender analysis into research methodologies and dissemination practices, policymakers can make more informed decisions to address gender disparities preserved by poorly conceived health policies.

Moving forward, Key Informant 6 stressed that continuous leadership support and endorsement are crucial for sustaining the integration of SGBA+ into policy frameworks and decision-making processes. Key Informant 7 suggested further enhancing accountability measures through regular review and refinement to better address gaps and inconsistencies.

3.2. Increased Capacity Building, Training, and Accountability Measures

The interviews showed substantial support among key informants for capacity building, training, and accountability measures related to the Health Portfolio's Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy. Key informants discussed the establishment of dedicated teams, training programs, and effort to enhance Health Portfolio member's expertise. Key informants also mentioned increased accountability measures, such as measuring adherence to SGBA+ principles by senior officials, indicating a strong commitment to building institutional capacity.

There was substantial support shown by key informants for the dedicated teams created to support the integration of the SGBA+ Policy. Key Informant 3 noted that tailored courses by specific units were created to enhance the understanding and application of SGBA+ principles. Successful capacity-building initiatives within Health Portfolio organizations such as department based action plans or knowledge-sharing processes was outline by Key Informant 4 as a major contributing factor to a supportive organizational culture.

Key Informant 8 noted that there has been a concerted effort to enhance staff expertise and promotion of SGBA+ utilization which evident though mandatory training programs and ongoing workshops provided to Health Portfolio members and employees. Integrating SGBA+ principles into performance evaluations and professional development plans further reinforces accountability and incentivizes staff to prioritize sex and gender considerations in their work, as emphasized by Key Informant 5.

There has been a shift towards measuring adherence to SGBA+ principles for Deputy Heads across all departments within the Health Portfolio, leading to increased accountability, as pointed out by Key Informant 3 and 7. The accountability framework ensures that the key decision-makers are held responsible for integrating SGBA+ into their respective areas of responsibility.

Key Informant 10 highlighted the role of leadership in fostering a culture of accountability by publicly endorsing and championing SGBA+ initiatives within their organizations. This visible support from senior leadership sends a clear message about the organizational commitment to gender equity and encourages staff to actively engage with SGBA+ principles in their day-to-day activities.

Efforts to integrate SGBA+ into day-to-day activities are evident across key informant discussions. Key Informant 9 drew attention to ongoing efforts to embed SGBA+ into organizational culture, recognizing the challenges associated with shifting perceptions regarding its responsibility. Key Informant 11 highlighted the noticeable shift in language and policy within the health portfolio towards expressing a greater understanding and prioritization of SGBA+, including the implementation of a SGBA+ Action Plan within Health Canada (Government of Canada, 2023).

These findings underscore a comprehensive approach to capacity building, training, and accountability within the health portfolio, reflecting a commitment to ensuring that SGBA+ principles are effectively integrated into policy development and decision-making processes. This theme was consistently represented across all key informants, highlighting a collective effort to foster a culture of inclusivity and equity within the Canadian Health Portfolio.

3.3. Incorporation into Decision-Making Processes and Policy Mandates

The interviews conducted provided significant insights regarding the incorporation of SGBA+ into decision-making processes and policy mandates, revealing both progress and areas for improvement. Key informants emphasized a clear shift towards comprehensive policy integration, with efforts aimed at embedding gender considerations into policymaking processes, as stated by Key Informant 1. Key Informant 2 offered support for this statement in noting that the shift extends to specific policy areas, funding criteria, and surveillance systems, contributing to more equitable public health interventions. Key informant 3 also emphasized the importance of diverse leadership representation and ongoing community consultations for meaningful policy change and effective implementation of SGBA+.

Key Informant 4 praised the systemic commitment Canada's Health Portfolio has to incorporating SGBA+ into decision-making processes which they noted reflects a broader commitment to addressing gender and equity disparities. Key Informant 4 says that these efforts are the first steps to creating more inclusive and equitable policy frameworks. Key Informant 5 stated that by tailoring interventions to diverse gender identities and involving communities in policy changes related to SGBA+ ensures that policies are contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of marginalized populations.

Moving forward, Key Informant 6 emphasized the need for enhanced community engagement to ensure that policies are responsive to diverse needs and perspectives, leading to more inclusive and effective outcomes. Key Informant 7 stated that further integration of SGBA+ into specific policy areas and funding criteria was deemed essential for promoting more equitable outcomes and addressing gender disparities in

healthcare. Key informants commended the Health Portfolio's SGBA+ Policy for the changes it made thus far but underscored the ongoing need for systemic commitment and proactive efforts to address gender disparities and promote health equity through policy change.

3.4. Improved Focus on Health Equity, Intersectionality, and Community Involvement

The interviews shed light on the growing emphasis on health equity, intersectionality, and community involvement within the Health Portfolio, revealing significant insights into efforts aimed at addressing health disparities and promoting inclusivity. Key Informants 8 and 9, championed the shift towards prioritizing health equity and community engagement. Key informants recognize the importance of disaggregated data and intersectional perspectives in tailoring interventions to diverse gender identities.

Key Informants 10 and 11, emphasized the significance of diverse leadership representation and ongoing community consultations for meaningful policy change and effective implementation of SGBA+. These efforts are seen as crucial for fostering a deeper understanding of gender-related issues and ensuring more equitable health policy. Key informants noted the visible efforts being made to address health disparities and promote inclusivity in health policy were underscored as essential for ensuring more equitable outcomes and fostering a culture of inclusivity within healthcare organizations.

Tailoring interventions to diverse gender identities and involving communities in policy changes related to SGBA+ were highlighted as key strategies for responsive policymaking noted by Key Informant 12. Key informants stressed the need for enhanced intersectional perspectives in SGBA+ analyses to gain a more nuanced understanding of health disparities and address the complex interplay of social determinants of health. Key Informants 3 and 4 pointed to further engagement of communities in policy changes related to SGBA+ was identified as critical for ensuring that policies are contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of marginalized populations.

3.5. Research-Policy Partnerships

The key informants showed strong support for continued research-policy partnerships and the integration of SGBA+ into grant funding processes. Key informants revealed that the SGBA+ Policy has led to facilitation of evidence-based policy development and the addressing of gender disparities in healthcare. Key Informant 5 emphasized the significance of collaborative projects between research institutions and policymakers, highlighting their role in generating recommendations that directly influence policy development, which is starting to bridge the gap between academia and government.

Key Informant 7 identified the requirement for researchers to incorporate SGBA+ into grant proposals as a crucial step in ensuring that research projects consider sex and gender implications. Key informant 7 continued in saying that the grant requirements have promoted more equitable outcomes through health policy because all projects must make SGBA+ considerations. This mandated integration of SGBA+ into grant funding processes was viewed as essential for addressing gender biases in research and promoting gender equity in health by Key Informant 9.

Key Informant 8 highlighted the integration of research-policy partnerships and SGBA+ into grant funding processes as pivotal in promoting evidence-based policy development and ensuring that research findings inform policy implementation, ultimately contributing to more equitable outcomes. Looking ahead, Key Informant 2 stressed the importance of continued alignment of funding incentives with broader policy objectives related to gender equity in health. Key Informant 2 encouraged for continued calls for researchers to prioritize gender considerations in their work and further promote the integration of SGBA+ into research initiatives.

Key Informant 2 highlighted the need for regular monitoring and reporting on the integration of SGBA+ into research projects to inform adjustments to strategies and ensure continuous improvement towards achieving gender equity goals in health. These findings underscore the importance of fostering research-policy partnerships and integrating SGBA+ into grant funding processes as key strategies for advancing evidence-based policy development and addressing gender disparities.

3.6. Educational Initiatives and Enhanced Consideration of Gender in Health Guidelines

The interviews conducted with key informants unveiled a significant emphasis on educational initiatives and enhanced consideration of gender in health guidelines, aiming to promote inclusivity and gender responsiveness within the health portfolio. Key Informant 8 stressed the importance of these initiatives, highlighting the development of training programs and improvements in education regarding sex and gender issues as pivotal in fostering a deeper understanding of gender-related issues within the health portfolio. Key Informant 6 emphasized how crucial tailoring public health messages to different gender identities enables the health portfolio to ensure that services are responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

According to Key Informant 5, increased awareness and understanding of SGBA+ among employees and the incorporation of SGBA+ principles into educational programs were noted as vital steps in fostering a culture of inclusivity and gender responsiveness within health portfolio organizations. Key Informant 13 highlighted how the integrating of SGBA+ into educational programs has equip health portfolio professionals with the knowledge and skills to address gender disparities effectively.

Looking ahead, key informants stressed the importance of continuous professional development opportunities and continued integration of SGBA+ principles into educational programs. As mentioned by Key Informant 7, in doing this, it will ensure that health portfolio professionals stay abreast of best practices and emerging trends in gender equity and inclusion within the health portfolio. Key Informant 4 underscored the significance of continued public engagement and storytelling efforts in raising awareness and promoting understanding of the importance of SGBA+ in policy development. Key Informant 4 further emphasizing how the public engagement and storytelling efforts have such transformative potential in advancing gender equity within the health portfolio. The findings highlighted the critical role of educational initiatives and enhanced consideration of gender in health guidelines in promoting inclusivity and gender responsiveness within health portfolio practices and policies.

Chapter 4. Discussion

The insights gained from key informant interviews provide valuable perspectives on the tangible changes resulting from the integration of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy within Canada's Health Portfolio. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of integrating SGBA+ principles into policy development and decision-making processes, revealing both successes and opportunities for improvements. From leadership commitment to policy integration to educational initiatives and enhanced consideration of gender in health guidelines, several tangible changes have emerged, shedding light on the complexities and nuances of advancing gender equity in health policy.

4.1. Tangible Changes Created by SGBA+

4.1.1. Leadership Commitment to Policy Integration

The leadership commitment within Canada's Health Portfolio reveals a multifaceted approach that extends beyond mere endorsement, which the literature notes is a key pillar in successful SGBA+ policies (Government of Canada, 2023). Leaders at all levels actively champion SGBA+ initiatives, demonstrating a genuine dedication to fostering gender equity and inclusivity (Health Canada, 2024). This resonated with the assertion made by several key informants that Canada is at the forefront when it comes to making sex and gender based considerations in federal policies. Their hands-on involvement not only underscores their commitment but also establishes a strong precedent for prioritizing sex- and gender-sensitive policy development and decision-making processes throughout the Health Portfolio (Government of Canada, 2023). This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the crucial role of leadership in driving organizational change and cultivating a culture of gender responsiveness (Tonelli et al., 2020).

The key informants identified the establishment of specialized mechanisms such as task forces and working groups dedicated to advancing gender considerations within policy frameworks, but they lacked concrete examples of policies directly influenced by SGBA+. This gap raises concerns about the efficacy of these mechanisms in translating

leadership commitment into tangible outcomes. It's noteworthy that existing research often emphasizes the importance of tangible outcomes as markers of successful policy integration efforts (Smith et al., 2020). The absence of such examples prompts reflection on the effectiveness of current approaches in bridging the gap between leadership commitment and policy implementation.

The allocation of resources specifically for SGBA+ initiatives underscores a tangible commitment to mainstreaming gender analysis across all facets of health policy development and implementation. This deliberate investment not only facilitates the integration of SGBA+ but also signifies a broader organizational shift towards prioritizing equity, diversity, and inclusion within the Health Portfolio (Government of Canada, 2023). By earmarking resources for SGBA+, decision-makers are signaling their recognition of the importance of gender-sensitive policy approaches in addressing systemic disparities and advancing health equity for all Canadians. Key informant also made note that some Health Portfolio Deputy Heads and those in higher office have SGBA+ deliverables attached to their compensation which encourages SGBA+ to be more than just a checkbox and ensures efforts go beyond performative.

The study's findings illuminate the nuanced nature of leadership commitment in advancing SGBA+ within the Health Portfolio. While vocal advocacy is crucial and successful. The policy has also generated concrete actions such as establishing collaborative platforms and resource allocation which are imperative for driving substantive change.

4.1.2. Increased Capacity Building, Training, and Accountability

The findings regarding notable efforts to increase institutional capacity-building, provide training, and enhance accountability mechanisms represent critical components in the successful implementation of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy within the Health Portfolio. These pillars serve as foundational elements for promoting inclusivity, equity, and responsiveness to diverse gender needs within health policy.

One aspect highlighted in the key informant interviews is the establishment of dedicated teams tasked with overseeing SGBA+ implementation. These teams serve as

central hubs for driving progress and fostering collaboration across various departments and disciplines within healthcare organizations. By centralizing expertise and resources, these teams play a pivotal role in coordinating efforts to integrate gender considerations into policies and practices. The emphasis on specialized training programs tailored to the unique needs of health policy professionals represents a proactive approach to building capacity in gender-sensitive analyses. These training programs are equipping staff and newly onboarded members with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct SGBA+ effectively.

The key informants underscore the importance of enhancing accountability mechanisms within the Health Portfolio by integrating SGBA+ considerations into performance evaluations at every level and professional development plans. This strategy aims to incentivize staff to prioritize gender considerations in their work and foster a culture of accountability and continuous learning. There is an opportunity for further exploration of the tangible impact of these efforts on policy outcomes and practices.

4.1.3. Incorporation into Decision-Making Processes and Policy Mandates

The increasing integration of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) into decision-making processes and policy mandates within Canada's Health Portfolio represents a significant shift. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the pivotal role that gender considerations play in shaping health outcomes and healthcare delivery (Government of Canada, 2018). However, while this integration is heralded as a step towards promoting gender equity and inclusivity, the results reveals some notable gaps and nuances in the implementation and impact of SGBA+. However, the current gaps can be rectified the during the next assessment of the SGBA+ Policy which done every five years.

Key informants primarily focused on the integration of gender considerations into policymaking which overlooks the intersectional nature of health disparities. This limitation neglects the importance of adopting more nuanced and inclusive approaches to policymaking within the Health Portfolio. Incorporating intersectionality into SGBA+

frameworks is crucial for better addressing the unique needs and experiences of marginalized populations, as highlighted by previous research (Hankivsky et al., 2014).

The efforts to integrate SGBA+ into decision-making processes and policy mandates represent a crucial step towards promoting gender equity and inclusivity in Health Portfolio. These efforts, despite needed improvements, supports Canada's international reputation for leading governments towards making more conscious decisions considering sex and gender. The comprehensive approach taken to embed gender considerations throughout the policymaking process signals a commitment to addressing systemic disparities and promoting more responsive healthcare systems. Moving forward, it is essential to strengthen the evidence base supporting SGBA+ and adopt more intersectional approaches to policymaking within the Health Portfolio. By doing so, policymakers can better address the complex and intersecting factors contributing to health inequities and foster more inclusive and equitable healthcare systems for all Canadians.

4.1.4. Improved Focus on Health Equity, Intersectionality, and Community Involvement

Key informants highlighted a significant shift within Canada's Health Portfolio towards prioritizing health equity, intersectionality, and community involvement in the integration of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy. This trend reflects a growing recognition among stakeholders of the intricate web of factors contributing to health disparities and the imperative to tailor interventions to meet the diverse needs of populations (Health Canada, 2018).

One notable aspect is the acknowledgment of the pivotal role of disaggregated data in unraveling the complexities of health disparities. Key informants emphasize the importance of collecting data disaggregated by various demographic variables, such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status which can be leveraged to drive tangible improvements in health policy. This observation echoes findings in the literature, which highlight the need to move beyond data collection towards utilizing data effectively to address health inequities (Government of Canada, 2023).

The results touches upon the adoption of an intersectional perspective in SGBA+, recognizing that individuals hold multiple intersecting social identities that shape

their experiences of health and well-being. This intersectional approach has been translated into actionable strategies within the Health Portfolio because it provides answers that people might thought to ask for. The operationalization of intersectionality in health policy is identified as best practice for addressing the intersecting needs of diverse populations (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2019).

The results highlights the importance of community involvement in SGBA+ policy and practices. By amplifying community voices and incorporating their perspectives into decision-making, policymakers can ensure that interventions are culturally responsive, relevant, and effective in addressing the priorities and concerns of local populations (Government of Canada, 2023).

The narrative paints a positive picture of progress towards promoting equity and diversity in health policies and practices through SGBA+, there are evident gaps and opportunities for further exploration. By addressing these gaps and building on existing efforts, stakeholders can harness the full potential of SGBA+ to advance health equity, promote social justice, and enhance the health and well-being of all individuals, irrespective of their gender identity or social background.

4.1.5. Research-Policy Partnerships

The results underscores the critical importance of research-policy partnerships in advancing evidence-based policymaking and addressing gender disparities in healthcare. These partnerships serve as bridges between the academic research community and policymakers, facilitating the translation of research findings into practical policy recommendations aimed at promoting gender equity and improving health outcomes (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2019). The collaborative nature of these projects allows for the exchange of knowledge and expertise between researchers and policymakers, enabling a more nuanced understanding of complex health issues and the development of targeted interventions (Hankivsky et al., 2014).

Literature agrees that research-policy partnerships drive tangible policy changes. Collaborative projects between researchers and policymakers lead to the implementation of evidence-informed policies that address gender disparities in healthcare delivery, improve access to services, and enhance health outcomes for

marginalized populations (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2019). For example, research-policy partnerships have been instrumental in informing the development of gender-sensitive healthcare programs and interventions tailored to the unique needs of diverse communities, such as initiatives aimed at reducing maternal mortality rates among Indigenous women or improving access to mental health services for LGBTQ+ individuals (Indigenous Services Canada, 2022).

Research-policy partnerships to drive positive change. The federal government has provided sustained funding and institutional support for collaborative research projects, which promote the long-term viability and impact of these partnerships (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2019).

The integration of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) into grant funding processes is highlighted as a promising strategy for promoting gender equity in research and policy. The policy has created frameworks through which funding agencies ensure that their evaluation criteria and review processes are designed to effectively assess the integration of sex and gender factors in research proposals (Health Canada, 2023). Efforts to enhance researcher capacity and provide training in SGBA+ methodologies are essential to support researchers in incorporating gender considerations into their work effectively (Health Canada, 2018).

Research-policy partnerships and the integration of SGBA+ into grant funding processes hold significant potential for advancing gender equity in research and policy. There is a need for continued investment, collaboration, and dialogue to overcome challenges and maximize impact.

4.1.6. Educational Initiatives and Enhanced Considerations of Gender in Health Guidelines

The emphasis on educational initiatives and the integration of gender considerations into health guidelines represents a significant step towards promoting gender equity and inclusivity within Canada's health policy landscape. Through mandatory training on Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) principles, the Health Portfolio equips future health policy professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address gender disparities effectively (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2019).

Existing literature underscores the importance of education in promoting gender equity in healthcare. Studies have shown that policymakers who receive training on SGBA+ principles demonstrate greater awareness of gender disparities and are more likely to integrate gender considerations into their policymaking (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2019).

The enhancement of gender considerations in health guidelines is a positive development, there may be gaps in the implementation and enforcement of these guidelines. Research suggests that health organizations struggle to translate gender-sensitive policies into practice, leading to inconsistencies in care delivery and outcomes (Women and Gender Equality Canada, 2019). Furthermore, there may be disparities in access to training and educational resources among healthcare professionals, which could exacerbate existing inequities (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2019).

Educational initiatives and the enhancement of gender considerations in health guidelines represent important steps towards promoting gender equity in healthcare, there is a need for continued investment, evaluation, and adaptation to ensure their effectiveness. By addressing challenges related to education and guideline implementation, stakeholders can work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system that meets the diverse needs of all individuals.

Chapter 5. Recommendations

5.1. Policy Option 1: Establish Interdisciplinary Collaboration Platforms

The interviews highlighted the necessity for interdisciplinary collaboration to effectively address gender disparities in healthcare policy. Creating platforms for collaboration among representatives from diverse sectors within and outside the Health Portfolio would enrich the SGBA+ Policy efforts and foster the development of innovative solutions which was echoed in the Health Canada Action Plan (2024). These platforms should facilitate regular meetings and knowledge-sharing sessions to promote ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders.

5.1.1. Implications

Establishing interdisciplinary collaboration platforms would facilitate the pooling of diverse expertise and perspectives, leading to more holistic and effective solutions for addressing gender disparities in health policy (Bendowska and Baum, 2023). Enhanced collaboration among stakeholders from various sectors with the Health Portfolio would promote a deeper understanding of complex health challenges and foster the development of innovative approaches to improve health outcomes (Alderwick, Hutchings, Briggs, and Mays, 2021). By fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration, these platforms would contribute to building trust and mutual respect among stakeholders, ultimately enhancing the sustainability and impact of SGBA+ initiatives (Health Canada, 2024).

5.2. Policy Option 2: Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement Mechanisms

Meaningful stakeholder engagement is crucial for ensuring the inclusivity and effectiveness of SGBA+ initiatives. Establishing formalized channels for ongoing consultation with diverse communities, such as community advisory boards or focus groups, would provide platforms for community members to express their concerns and

actively participate in shaping SGBA+ policies (Women and Gender Equity Canada, 2021). Organizing regular community forums or town hall meetings would offer opportunities for policymakers to interact directly with community members and solicit their input on SGBA+ initiatives.

5.2.1. Implications

Improving stakeholder engagement mechanisms would ensure that the voices and priorities of marginalized and underrepresented communities are heard and integrated into SGBA+ initiatives, leading to more inclusive and equitable policies (Canadian Research Coordinating Committee, 2021). By providing platforms for community members to actively participate in shaping SGBA+ policies, these mechanisms would foster a sense of ownership and empowerment within communities, enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of healthcare interventions (Government of Canada, 2023). Enhanced stakeholder engagement would promote transparency and accountability in decision-making processes, strengthening public trust in the Health Portfolio and contribute to the overall success of SGBA+ efforts.

5.3. Policy Option 3: Prioritize Research to Address Data Gaps

To fill existing gaps in gender-specific health data and inform gender-sensitive policy development, allocating resources and funding for research projects aligned with SGBA+ goals is essential. Collaboration between researchers and policymakers should be facilitated to ensure that research efforts address the diverse needs of populations and promote gender equity in healthcare policy effectively (Canadian Research Coordinating Committee, 2021). Identifying and prioritizing research areas aligned with the SGBA+ Policy goals through consultation with stakeholders would further enhance the relevance and impact of research initiatives. Most specifically, through the collection of desegregated data.

5.3.1. Implications

Prioritizing research to address data gaps would generate valuable evidence to inform further sex- and gender-sensitive policy development and promote equitable health outcomes for all individuals and communities. Collaboration between researchers and policymakers would ensure that research efforts are targeted and effective in addressing gender disparities in health, leading to more informed decision-making and resource allocation (Hay et al., 2019). Identifying and prioritizing research areas aligned with SGBA+ goals through stakeholder consultation would enhance the relevance and impact of research initiatives, ultimately contributing to the development of evidence-based interventions to improve health equity (Government of Canada, 2023).

5.4. Policy Option 4: Integrate Cultural Competency Training into Health Policy

Promoting cultural competency and sensitivity among health policymakers is critical for addressing disparities. Integrating training on cultural competency and anti-oppressive practices into existing SGBA+ training programs would address gaps in cultural competency training and ensure that policymakers are equitable and culturally responsive (Nair and Adetayo, 2019). Developing interactive workshops and case studies focusing on intersectional identities and experiences would enhance understanding and empathy within the Health Portfolio and Canadian health policy.

5.4.1. Implications

Integrating cultural competency training would enhance the Health Portfolio's ability to provide equitable and culturally responsive policy for diverse populations, ultimately improving health outcomes. Developing interactive workshops and case studies focusing on intersectional identities and experiences would promote greater understanding and empathy among policymakers, contributing to a more inclusive and respectful health environment (Holman et al., 2021). By addressing gaps in cultural competency training, this policy option would help reduce disparities perpetuated by poorly crafted health policy and contribute to building a more inclusive and culturally competent health sectors in Canada.

5.5. Policy Option 5: Establish Robust Monitoring and Evaluation Processes

Establishing standardized indicators and benchmarks to track progress in the SGBA+ Policy implementation is crucial for ensuring accountability and continuous improvement. Regular evaluations of SGBA+ initiatives and policies, incorporating stakeholder feedback, would provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and impact (Government of Canada, 2023). Implementing feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or focus groups, would further enhance monitoring efforts and ensure that SGBA+ initiatives are responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

5.5.1. Implications

Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation processes throughout all levels of the Health Portfolio would ensure accountability and continuous improvement in SGBA+ implementation, leading to more effective and impactful healthcare policies and interventions. Regular evaluations of SGBA+ initiatives and policies, incorporating stakeholder feedback, would provide valuable insights into their effectiveness and impact, enabling policymakers to make data-driven decisions and allocate resources more efficiently (Government of Canada, 2023).

Chapter 6. Limitations

This project offers valuable insights into integration of the Health Portfolios's SGBA+ Policy, however, two primary limitations emerged. Firstly, time constraints and scheduling conflicts among federal employees presented challenges, affecting participant accessibility. Secondly, participants, being public servants, were subject to professional and confidentiality constraints, potentially limiting information disclosure.

These limitations, compounded by study design constraints such as sample size, duration, and scope, hindered the depth of insights obtained. Additionally, while PHAC allowed the project to proceed after a throughout review from their internall research ethics board.

Future research endeavors could consider integrating qualitative assessments or case studies to provide a more nuanced understanding of how these initiatives translate into tangible improvements in gender equity and inclusivity within policy domains. Evaluating the effectiveness of training programs and accountability mechanisms through longitudinal studies or comparative analyses could yield valuable insights into best practices for advancing gender-sensitive policies and practices in governmental settings.

Further research is warranted to delve deeper into the effectiveness of these mechanisms and their impact on promoting gender equity and inclusivity within policy and governmental practice.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This project has provides crucial insights into advancing the integration of Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (SGBA+) Policy within Canada's Health Portfolio. The study's findings underscore the importance of addressing gender-based disparities and promoting health equity across diverse populations. Based on these findings, a comprehensive set of policy recommendations has been proposed, including mandating gender-sensitive metrics, promoting SGBA+ training, fostering community engagement, establishing robust accountability mechanisms, and nurturing strategic partnerships. These recommendations mark a significant step towards creating a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system.

However, implementing these recommendations presents inherent complexities and challenges. Meaningful community involvement and overcoming engagement barriers will require tailored approaches and sustained commitment from stakeholders. Challenges such as resistance to change, resource constraints, organizational inertia, data challenges, and inadequate training among professionals and policymakers must be addressed. Despite these obstacles, further integration of SGBA+ within the Health Portfolio is imperative to prioritize equity and inclusivity in health policy. By navigating these challenges and optimizing strategies through continued collaboration, adaptation, and evaluation, the vision of a more equitable and inclusive health policy and systems for all Canadians can be realized.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide

Introduction:

- Welcome and thank the participant for their time.
- Explain the purpose of the interview and its importance in evaluating the GBA+ Policy's effectiveness.
- Mention that the interview will take approximately one hour and a half.
- Ensure the participant's consent for audio recording and note-taking.

Section 1: Background and Role

Can you provide a brief overview of your current role and responsibilities within the Health Portfolio?

How long have you been in your current position, and could you describe any significant changes or developments in your role during this time?

Section 2: Policy Considerations

Can you share your experiences related to the integration of the Sex- and Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) Policy within your organization?

What strategies or initiatives have been put in place to promote the utilization of GBA+ principles in the Health Portfolio's activities?

Have there been any specific challenges or obstacles encountered during the implementation of the GBA+ Policy? If so, could you elaborate on them?

Section 3: Perceived Impact

From your perspective, do you believe that the GBA+ Policy has led to changes within the Canadian healthcare system?

In your opinion, has the policy helped in mitigating gender-based health disparities, and can you share any specific outcomes or improvements that you've observed?

How do you think health care has evolved because of the GBA+ Policy? Are there any changes that make healthcare more inclusive for individuals across diverse gender and identity spectrums?

Section 4: Policy Enhancement

Based on your experiences, what recommendations or suggestions do you have for enhancing the GBA+ Policy to better achieve its objectives?

Are there any areas where additional support or resources are needed to further advance the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusivity within the Health Portfolio?

Section 5: The Big Picture

In your view, what is the overarching significance of the GBA+ Policy within the Canadian healthcare landscape, particularly in relation to gender equality and healthcare disparities?

How do you believe this research project contributes to the development of policies that are genuinely equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of the population within the healthcare system?