Virtual Learning Together Series Webinar Recap

Supporting the Wellbeing of Staff in Shelters and Substance Use Centers – Part II

Tuesday June 29, 2021

Takeaways

Sex and gender-based analysis can be challenging to incorporate into workplace mental health

There are a lot of different experiences to unpack regarding socialization, sex and gender, racialization, colonization and so on. Testing *Mental Health in the Workplace: A SGBA+ Informed Toolkit* with focus groups was helpful in understanding sex and gender-based analysis (SGBA+) knowledge gaps (such as difficulty making a link between sex and gender and workplace mental health) and the refinements needed to address these.

Managers are a particularly important audience for SGBA+ and mental health resources

Managers play a really important role, at both a team and organizational level, in embedding learning and promising practices in different structures within the organization.

A SGBA+ toolkit is a useful resource for any organization

It helps build personal, managerial and organizational capacity to better promote, manage and support mental health.
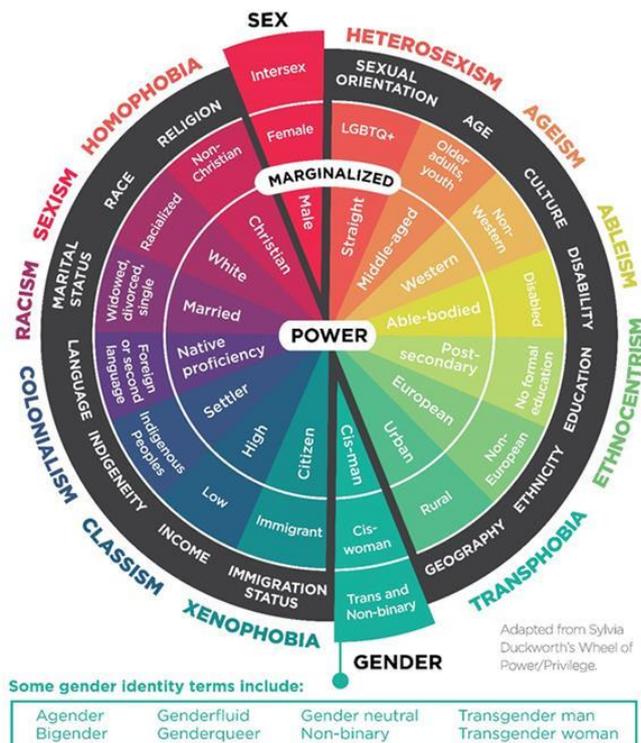
Recap

Dr Ivy Bourgeault from the University of Ottawa discussed how mental health and psychological safety at work is heavily influenced by sex and gender, and how recognizing this both from a manager/ and employee perspective is important to help build capacity to support each other's mental health. Ivy presented the *Mental Health in the Workplace: A SGBA+ Informed Toolkit*, which provides resources to address workplace stress and mental health; work–life balance; workplace discrimination and bias; harassment and bullying; and stigma, disclosure and help-seeking.

Mental Health in the Workplace

Mental health and psychological safety at work are heavily influenced by sex (the more biological aspects) and gender (the more sociological overlay). It used to be thought that taking a gender-neutral approach would be fair to everybody and equal – but equal is not necessarily equitable.

A policy partnership led by Dr Ivy Bourgeault with Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada supported by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research Institute of Gender and Health, created the *[Mental Health in the Workplace: A Sex and Gender-based Analysis (SGBA+) Informed Toolkit](#)* and [video series](#).

SEX
HETEROSEXISM
HOMOPHOBIA
AGEISM
SEXISM
RACISM
ABLEISM
COLONIALISM
ETHNOCENTRISM
CLASSISM
TRANSPHOBIA
XENOPHOBIA
GENDER

MARGINALIZED
POWER

Intersex, Female, Male — Non-Christian, Christian — Racialized, White — Widowed, divorced, single — Married — Foreign or second language, Native proficiency — Indigenous peoples, Settler — Low, High — Immigrant, Citizen — Trans and Non-binary, Cis-woman, Cis-man — LGBTQ+, Straight — Older adults, youth, Middle-aged — Non-Western, Western — Disabled, Able-bodied — No formal education, Post-secondary — Non-European, European — Rural, Urban

RELIGION, RACE, MARITAL STATUS, LANGUAGE, INDIGENEITY, INCOME, IMMIGRATION STATUS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, AGE, CULTURE, DISABILITY, EDUCATION, ETHNICITY, GEOGRAPHY

Adapted from Sylvia Duckworth's Wheel of Power/Privilege.

Some gender identity terms include:

Agender	Genderfluid	Gender neutral	Transgender man
Bigender	Genderqueer	Non-binary	Transgender woman

Sex and gender-based analysis (SGBA+):

- applies critical questions to uncover similarities and differences in the experiences of different identity groups

- goes beyond single identities to include identity intersections (sex/gender, race, Indigenous identity, disability, etc.)

- understands that interactions with workplace contexts, processes and activities also affect mental and psychological health.

The toolkit is based on:

1. A targeted review of the mental health and workplace wellness literature, which showed clear sex/gender and other differences in issues such as work–life balance and the effects of different workplace stressors (e.g. bullying and harassment).

2. Interviews with senior level staff about potential barriers and enablers to adopting SGBA+ and mental health knowledge, which helped create a framework for the toolkit through:

   - revealing gaps in sex-disaggregated quantitative data

   - proposing ways to influence and support the dissemination, uptake and implementation of the toolkit materials.

3. Focus groups with HC/PHAC employees working in various locations to assess their knowledge and needs with respect to SGBA+ and mental health, which revealed:

- some had difficulty making links between sex/gender and workplace mental health

- suggestions to address lack of knowledge (e.g. how to approach someone showing signs of problems)

- suggestions for better workplace support for mental health and stress

- managers are the major audience for SGBA+ and mental health.

Mental Health in the Workplace: A SGBA+ Informed Toolkit:

- engages its audience at different levels, from novice (very little background) upwards

- presents vignettes with a variety of different elements that people can relate to (whether one or more of them), which prompt managers to reflect on the action needed

- provides evidence-informed support to diverse workplaces, managers, employees and their families, and services designed to help employees

- contains resources for workplace mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions

Did senior managers already identify that sex and gender-based analysis is important or did you have to get buy-in from them?

The interviewees mostly already had buy-in; some were champions of this. Others were more reluctant, as this was in part a top-down project. Some may have experienced issues raised by employees and been part of ongoing initiatives, but this was in essence a ministerial mandate about incorporating sex and gender-based analysis that then permeated through the system.

How did you support those who were more hesitant?

Everybody has different identities and experiences. We made the toolkit and videos as accessible and straightforward as possible, to support people in realising that change is required and we all need to undertake this work. To go beyond the taboo of talking about mental health, we wanted to create a sense of safety for everybody and be able to move forward in a positive way through providing tangible, pragmatic information and actions that they can work on. People gave a lot of feedback on the microaggressions section and how it made them reflect on their lack of understanding that these are really inappropriate.

How can we build a psychologically safe workplace at an organizational level?

It involves interplay between the work of individuals (as employees, colleagues, managers), work within the team and work within the organization. On the broader societal level, people are talking more about mental health and substance use and trying to destigmatize that. The organization is at the intersection between what's happening societally and what's happening individually and within teams. Managers are the practical link in the chain who spread learning and promising practices both at the interpersonal level and across the organization.

How can we educate people about work–life balance issues?

Although our work–life balance has been blurred because of the pandemic, we now have greater acknowledgement and understanding of people's home lives and how that impacts on their work, so there are more adjustments made based on that. We can't ignore this increased awareness as we gradually move back into a hybrid of workplace and remote working.

What considerations need to be addressed in the virtual context in regard to psychological health and safety during the pandemic?

There are a variety of different layers. Individually some workers do very well, they are very focused and independent. Others really need people to be around them, they need those inputs, whether from a social or a creativity perspective. Rather than coming by someone's office, reaching out to colleagues when working remotely is much more formal, so there's less flexibility in that sense. We haven't really figured out what the impacts of the virtual environment have been because we've moved to it in the context of a pandemic. Some issues have taken a different form rather than being eliminated – for example, workplace bullying, although it may be more apparent because of the electronic traces.

About the Virtual Learning Together Series Visit the Healthcare Excellence Canada [website](#).

You can access this webinar recording on YouTube [here](#).