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EVIDENCE BRIEF

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SSHRC's Imagining Canada's Future initiative mobilizes social sciences and humanities research to address emerging economic, societal and knowledge needs for Canada, and help guide decision-making across all sectors towards a better future. This evidence brief addresses the Future Challenge Area of: **Informing Best Practices in Environmental and Impact Assessments**.

Gender-Based Analysis Plus: Implementing and developing a socially responsible impact assessment process in Canada

About the project

The need for gendered and culturally sensitive analyses of the impacts of resource development is being echoed across Canada. This is particularly important in rural, remote and Indigenous communities most affected by resource development, where individuals—especially women and girls—bear the embodied burden of these impacts. Section 22 (s) of Canada's *Impact Assessment Act (IAA)* says that sex, gender and other identity factors must be considered during Impact Assessments (IA). This clause is an overdue response to the increasing awareness of the need for improved regulation and the development of social and cultural impact assessment processes. Section 22 (s) also provides an opportunity to address the social impacts of resource development to build a more gender-inclusive and equitable federal IA process.

The need for gender sensitive impact assessment is clear, but how to design and conduct assessments that meaningfully include the impacts on sex and gender is less so. Bringing informed practices into environmental and impact assessments requires a widespread understanding of Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+).

A systemic and critical literature review (n=56) provided an evidence base for improving the tools and methods used to integrate GBA+ practices into impact assessments in Canada. It also confirmed the need for:

- an equity and anti-oppression-informed approach to integrating indicator frameworks in GBA+; and
- further resources to fill a major gap in knowledge and practice relating to gender-based violence, project appraisal and resource development.

Key findings

- Because communities are unique and require context-specific frameworks, an equity and anti-oppression-informed approach is required when developing and implementing sex and gender indicators.
- Attention to the impacts of colonialism, including violence against women in association with resource development, is needed. Both literature and practice fail to address the intersection of impact assessments and gender-based violence. Impact assessments generally emphasize employment equity rather than sexual violence in their

gender analysis. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) on extractive industries makes a direct call to justice in assessment and regulatory processes: this call is not being met in current research or policy.

- A bottom-up approach is needed. Gender mainstreaming in Canada tends to focus on the work of policy experts. Our findings indicate the need to work directly with affected communities from the early planning phase through to project closure. However, there are obstacles



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to implementation that need to be addressed, including a lack of funding for Indigenous and women's organizations.

- Current impact assessment methods lack deep engagement with the “plus” in GBA+, including a failure to engage with queer and Two-Spirit communities. Women and men are typically understood through a binary lens within impact assessment, even when a gendered analysis within impact assessment and GBA+ is used.
- Canadian IA processes require methodological innovation and the participation of third-party researchers with expertise in gender-based violence, Indigenous-led research and widespread, inclusive community engagement. Work to implement GBA+ and Indigenous GBA+ is also mandatory during the planning phase, with follow up throughout the project.

Policy implications

- GBA+ is not a prescribed method but a way of thinking or a lens. As such there is a challenge in implementing GBA+ analysis to mainstream patterns and develop indicators that are sensitive to not just sex and gender identity, but also to impacts of racialized gendered oppression.
- The impacts of gender violence on communities must be addressed. Researchers and policy-makers must respond to the Final Report of the MMIWG Inquiry, including demands for gender-based socio-economic assessments. Policy-makers require increased awareness of confidentiality, trauma and culturally sensitive research to carry out work that begins with disaggregated data and community statements and extends well beyond.
- Policy must work to overcome structural, epistemic, methodological and practice-based discrimination. Government departments need to:
 - include feminist and Indigenous research specialists among staff;
 - institutionalize training and awareness of GBA+ and best practices; and
 - institute systems of accountability to ensure thorough and consistent implementation of GBA+ policies in all impact assessment projects.
- Emphasize intersectionality in impact assessment. Impact assessments need to become more sensitive to the experiences of women and gender-diverse people, to toxic masculinities and other axes of inequality (sexualities, class, gender, and the interplay of racism, sexism, colonization and Indigeneity). In particular, the implications of GBA+ and impact assessment on gender non-binary populations needed to be examined, including on LGBTQ2SI+ communities, as well as intersectionalities within the Indigenous experience.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

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The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) is a federal body accountable to the minister of Environment and Climate Change. The IAAC delivers high-quality impact assessments that contribute to informed decision-making on major projects in support of sustainable development.

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