GENDER EQUITY

Where matters of justice and fairness are concerned, gender equality and equity are distinct but related.

Gender Equality

Gender equality means that people of all gender identities enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their full human rights; to contribute to national, political, economic, social, and cultural developments; and to benefit from the results of those developments.[1]

Obstacles to full gender equality are often shaped by social systems that impact people's "life chances" in different ways.

Gender equity provides a lens for examining and addressing these obstacles to gender equality.

Gender Equity

Gender equity is about being fair to people of all gender identities. It is the process of remedying historical and social oppressions that would otherwise prevent people from fully contributing to political, cultural, and social life—and enjoying the benefits that this contribution brings.[2]

In many cases, this also means transforming the root causes of those oppressions altogether.

Discussion of gender equity and inequity require critically examining how gender shapes some of the unequal circumstances and intersecting oppressions people face in society, so as to strive toward greater fairness and justice for all.

"Equity contributes to equality."[3]

We invite you to use the information and images in this Issue as tools in your training, public education campaigns, and awareness efforts.
Sections of this Issue engage with difficult topics. If you are in need of support, click here to access a list of available resources.

GENDER INEQUITIES & INEQUALITIES IN THE LABOUR FORCE

Traditional beliefs about masculinity & femininity influence the kinds of inequities people experience in the workplace and at home.

Consider the following examples in the Canadian context:

Unpaid Domestic Labour

Women perform a greater proportion of routine housework (e.g. cooking, cleaning) and care duties (for children and family or friends) than men, who tend to perform more episodic, discretionary duties (e.g. lawn mowing, repairs, gardening).[4]

History of Exclusion from the Workforce

With some exceptions (e.g. working-class women and women of colour), women were historically excluded from major sectors of the labour force and relegated to lower status positions and occupations.[5] Today, women of colour and Indigenous women are especially underrepresented among Canada's top earning and decision- making positions.[6]

Unequal Gender Roles and Power Relations

Masculine identity has traditionally been attached to characteristics of competitiveness, rationality, and a "breadwinner" role, whereas feminine identity is associated with cooperativeness, emotion, and nurturing roles. Men, women, transgender, and two-spirit individuals are often stigmatized when they transgress these patriarchal norms.

Consider the following examples in the Canadian context:

- Women are over 2x more likely than men to take time away from work for family or personal responsibilities.[7]

- 25% of women reported caring for children as their reason for working part-time, compared to 3.3% of men.[8]

- 68% of the top 10% of income earners in Canada are men.[9]

- 76% of the part-time labour force is made up of women.[10]

- Women tend to occupy lower status positions than men within both male- and female-dominated industries. 60% of chefs and cooks are men, while 72% of food counter attendants, kitchen helpers, and support personnel are women.[11]

- 25% of professional occupations in natural and applied sciences are held by women.[12]

ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY REMAINS AN INCOMPLETE PROCESS

Within Canada, the story of gender equality is a story of stalled and uneven progress.

STALLED PROGRESS FOR INCOME EQUALITY

Differences in men's and women's average personal income decreased from $32,300 in 1976 to $16,100 in 2015.[13] However, most of this change occurred before 1995 and for the past two decades, the gap remains largely consistent.[14]

(See, e.g. Statistics Canada, 2018)[15]

According to the World Economic Forum, the overall gender gap in North America will take another 151 years to close at its current rate.[16]

However, gender inequity runs deeper than the comparative economic outcomes that men and women experience (or the individual choices they make). A gender analysis actually tells only part of the story.

Marginalization based on ethno-racial identity, birthplace, disability, and sexuality are not experienced in isolation from gender; rather, these circumstances intersect in many people's lives to produce patterns and experiences that may be left invisible if we focus solely on gender inequality.

Evidence and experience show that equitable solutions to social problems require efforts to resolve the injustices occurring not only within individual systems but also at the various intersections among these systems.

INTERSECTIONAL GENDER EQUITY

An intersectional approach to gender equity helps prevent us from making "one-size-fits all" assumptions about fairness and empowerment.

Canada's national narrative is tightly connected to ideals of equal rights, individual freedoms, and multicultural diversity. However, there is still work to be done in order to fully realize these ideals in practice.

Patterns of inequality and inequity coalesce around some recurring social issues (e.g. race, class, age, and gender)[17] that some Canadians know all too well. Direct discussions of these issues make some feel uncomfortable and solutions are often viewed as unobtainable or the responsibility of others.

Despite the considerable prosperity enjoyed by some, there are unique and substantial disadvantages and injustices experienced by others.

Gendered oppressions are often ingrained in our social structures (e.g. the norms, institutions, and hierarchies that order people's lives), and operate in concert with other sites of marginalization.

These systems may overlap and reinforce the obstacles people face, producing cumulative disadvantage and/or intersecting oppressions. Addressing the ways that gendered oppression may be interconnected with systems like racism, cissexism, and colonialism is therefore crucial for promoting equity and equality.[18]

Learn More about how interconnecting systems of marginalization can shape people's lived experiences, opportunities, and outcomes, in our Issue on Intersectionality. [19]

UNEQUAL EMPLOYMENT INCOME IN ONTARIO

"Ontario's labour market is increasingly racialized and persistently unequal." — Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives[20]

- Racialized women earn 85% of what non- racialized women earn.
- Racialized men earn 76% of what non- racialized men earn.[21]

When comparing the employment income of all workers, the average differences between non-racialized men and racialized women reflects the combined effects of racism and sexism:

- Racialized women make $0.58 for every $1 that non-racialized men make.[22]

INEQUITY & PRECARITY ACROSS CANADA

Studies show how gender inequities are experienced across other dimensions of social marginalization as well:

- 29% of visible minority immigrant women between 15–24 years are in a low-income situation, compared with 18.6% of same-aged Canadian-born visible minority women.[23]

- 50% of transgender people in Ontario earn less than $15,000 per year, and 1 in 3 live in poverty.[24]

- 49% of First Nations women living off reserve reported that they would be able to cover an unexpected expense of $500, compared to 64% of First Nations men off reserve.[25]

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Power inequities in the home, the workplace, and in the broader society create the context that supports Gender-Based Violence (GBV).[26]

Research on GBV in Canada demonstrates how it is deeply interconnected with systems of inequity like ableism, sexism, classism, colonialism, and racism. Not only do these systems impact an individual's vulnerability to experiencing GBV, they each entail unique obstacles to escaping or recovering from a violent situation.

Reciprocally, the experience of GBV often exacerbates the negative effects of these inequalities as well.

The following section highlights the prevalence of gender inequity in two forms of GBV: Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) includes physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse.

- Nearly 8 in 10 cases of police- reported IPV is against women.[27]
- Women are killed by an intimate partner at over 5x the rate of men[28]

An equity lens requires us to acknowledge that not all people experience IPV at the same rates or in the same ways. Among experiencers of IPV:

- Indigenous women are more likely to fear for their lives (52% [E]) than non-Indigenous women (31%).[29]
- Bisexual individuals experience IPV at higher rates (47%) than gay and lesbian individuals (27%).[30]
- The most severe forms of violence* are experienced by greater proportions of women with a disability (39%) than men with a disability (16%[E]).[31]

[Notes: * "Severe forms of violence" include being sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a weapon; [E] Estimate—use with caution]

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is a broad term that describes any violence, physical or psychological, carried out through sexual means or by targeting sexuality.[32]

Like IPV, sexual violence affects individuals of all gender identities, and its harms are no more or less traumatic for members of one group of individuals than another. All experiencers of sexual violence deserve to be heard, supported, and given justice.

Below, we examine some of the ways that sexual violence is experienced inequitably in Canadian society.

Research from the General Social Survey reveals the need for recognizing different rates of sexual violence within Rainbow communities.

- Bisexual Canadians are almost **9x** more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to report experiencing sexual assault.[33]

- LGB individuals are over **2x** more likely to report being sexually assaulted than those who identify as heterosexual.[34]

Women with disabilities related to mental health are also more likely to experience repeat incidents of violence than women with no such condition. [35]

- 7% of women with mental health-related disability report experiencing a sexual assault in the past year, compared with 2% of women with no mental health disability.[36]

Police-reported sexual violence is substantially higher for young women than young men, despite the fact that they report similar rates of physical violence.

These rates are:

- 3x higher for girls than boys 11 years & younger.[37]

- 9x higher for girls than boys 12–17 years old.[38]

- 14x higher for young women than young men 18–24 years old.[39]

Men and boys are often deterred from disclosing sexual violence because of social norms governing masculinity and the limited availability of services. Issues they may contend with include:[40]

- Legitimacy — "Men can't be sexually assaulted." "No one will believe me."

- Masculinity — "My manhood has been stolen."

- Sexual identity — "Will others think I only pretended not to like it?"

- Strength and Power — "I should have been able to fend him/her/them off." "I shouldn't have let this happen."

- Where to turn for support[41] — "Why would I report this to police?"[42]

"Many variables come into play and the most glaring deficiency is that supports and services for boys and men are few and far between. Supports and services that are available have long waiting lists and are not easily accessed by people that will benefit the most from them... it is time to listen to the people in need to determine what will help."

— John Swales, *Father, University Student, Sexual Violence Survivor, Advocate*[43]

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS INFLUENCE WHO SEEKS SUPPORT

Marginalized persons often experience institutionalized discrimination (e.g. cisnormativity, ableism, heterosexism), which may prevent them from receiving the social, legal, or medical support they need.

- For older women, transgender women, and women with disabilities, shelters may not be equipped to accommodate the particular forms of safety and support needed. See our series of Issues on [homelessness and violence against women](#) to learn more.[44]

- Women with a mental health disability are less likely to report experiences of violence to police (22%[E]) than those without a mental health disability (31%).[45]

- 61% of Indigenous gender-diverse participants in the Ontario-based Trans PULSE Project reported at least one unmet health care need in the past year (19 out of 32 participants).[46]

These examples bring to light the way that long-standing patterns of social stigma and marginalization come to be reproduced in Canada.

Although fairness requires equitable allocations of resources and support, it also requires a transformation of social structures and norms that impose real harm on people within our society.

Neither the elimination of structural violence nor the goal of gender equity can be adequately addressed without addressing both.

Accordingly, the issues spotlighted below highlight why equity requires not simply compensation for, but the dismantling of systemic oppression.

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT: MISSING & MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN & GIRLS

For years, Indigenous leaders and communities have decried the prevalence of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls as a form of ongoing colonial violence.

While homicide rates have declined for non-Indigenous women in Canada since 1980, they have increased for Indigenous women.[47]

- 4% of women in Canada are Indigenous[48]

However, Indigenous women make up:

- 10% of all missing women[49]

- 21% of homicide cases involving female victims[50]

"The process of colonization created the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. The report [National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls] exposes this crisis that is centuries in the making. It also highlights that discrimination is deeply rooted in policies, practices and laws, denying Indigenous women their basic human rights." —Native Women's Association of Canada[51]

LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT IS BEING DONE TO ADDRESS THIS CRISIS

- The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) has produced a Toolkit to assist families of missing women. It provides guidance on interacting with police and media, as well short- and long-term strategies for self-care and wellbeing throughout the process.[52]

- ONWA's Indigenous Anti-Human Trafficking Liaison Project, Safe SPACES, develops a holistic, strength-based, Indigenous Survivor-led approach to addressing human trafficking specifically.[53]

- 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations (2 Spirits) is a non-profit social service organization that provides education and support for 2-Spirit, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. They base their work on Indigenous philosophies of wholistic health and wellness.

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT: WHO FEELS SAFE AFTER DARK?

Gender inequity shapes how safe people feel as they walk through the world, including where and when they feel safe in their own communities.
Different intersections of social inequity present different dangers in public space.

Although Canadians' sense of safety is one of the highest among OECD* countries, this sense is not shared evenly throughout the population.[54]

- 38% of women feel very safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, compared to 64% of men.[55]

- Hate crimes based on sexual orientation are more likely to be violent, and more likely to result in assault and physical injury than those based on race/ethnicity, or religion.[56]

Along with other frequent targets of hate crime (e.g. Black, Jewish, LGBTQ2S populations), Muslims are among the most likely to be targeted by a stranger.[57]

- 1 in 5 Muslim women reported feeling unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark.[58]

Indigenous women are more likely to be murdered outside a residence than Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women. [59]

- 17% of homicides of Indigenous women occurred on a street, road, or highway, whereas this proportion is 1% among non-Indigenous women.[60]

A gender equity analysis enables us to confront these diverse forms of violence and marginalization and to develop correspondingly diverse strategies for protecting and empowering individuals.

[Note: * Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development]

EMERGING ISSUE: CLIMATE CHANGE AS SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & CHILDREN

Climate change is a form of large-scale industrial, systemic violence against humans, other species, and the earth.

"As women suffer disproportionally from poverty, they will also suffer most when erratic weather brings droughts or floods to marginal lands or crowded urban areas where poverty is most felt." —United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)[61]

BIODIVERSITY & CULTURE

Climate change threatens the availability of resources for medicine collection, food preparation, and handicrafts which are important aspects of Indigenous women's traditional knowledge, food security, and livelihood.[62]

WATER

"Water is what sustains us. Water is what brings us into this world, and water is what keeps us in this physical world. And so it's our life." —Jan Longboat, Mohawk Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River[63]

Droughts, extreme weather, and resource extraction can lead to drastic water shortages, flooding, and contamination.

In many developing countries, women and girls are often their family's primary water collectors and managers. They face increased danger of sexual violence when walking long distances to find water.[64]

Among Indigenous communities in Canada, many women identify as water carriers and water protectors. They protect water from resource extraction even in the face of industrial and state violence. [65]

It is time that we understand climate change as both a cause and a form of violence in its own right—particularly against Indigenous peoples, the poor, women, children, the Global South, and future generations.

FROM INJUSTICE TO EMPOWERMENT: ACTION FOR EQUITY

In its 2019 index of gender inequality around the world, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) finds that "[Canada's] policy response to VAW [violence against women] is one of the most comprehensive in the world and the prevalence rate of VAW (2%) is the lowest globally."[66]

This standing reflects the resilient and ongoing efforts of service workers, survivors, allies, and advocates.

In order to continue moving forward to end gender-based violence, and achieve gender equality and equity in *all* areas of Canadian society, Canadians should:

- Ensure anti-racism and anti-oppression approaches to all equality and equity work.

- Continue to seek and research effective ways to address structural inequities that are multi-faceted, scalable, and feasible to implement.[67]

- Establish benchmarks, proximal and distal outcomes, and feasible methodologies to evaluate solutions and ensure that what solves one structural inequity does not unintentionally create other disadvantages or hardships for marginalized individuals or groups.

- Build broad intersectional coalitions to inform solutions and strengthen the societal and political will to find solutions to social inequities. Such an investment must encompass the safety, well-being, and health of all people living in Canada.

- Promote culturally responsive and empowering models of healthy masculinity (e.g. Native Women's Association of Canada's Project PEACE[68], Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres' I Am A Kind Man[69], White Ribbon's Gender-Based Violence Prevention Campaign[70]).

- Eliminate institutionalized stigma and discrimination in police and social services, and make amends with marginalized communities. One aspect of this process would involve training police and service providers to better serve survivors of sexual violence—particularly those who are LGBTQ2S, Indigenous, immigrants, non-English speaking, poor, or struggling with addiction.

- Develop holistic, strength-based, survivor-led healing and policies to address gender-based violence, racism, human trafficking, and hate crimes, especially those targeting marginalized individuals and groups.

When we think of achieving gender equity, we are thinking about how to provide fair treatment under unequal circumstances, and how addressing the underlying causes of those inequalities might foster greater fairness moving forward.

In order to achieve a truly fair and just society for people of all gender identities, the Learning Network is committed to fostering strength-based, culturally responsive learning and actions that will make gender equity a reality.

PLEASE EVALUATE THIS ISSUE!

Let us know what you think. Your input is important to us. Please complete this brief survey on your thoughts of this Issue: https://uwo.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/ SV_0AJF19imRXIHPMx

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