

Initial project duration – 36 months – starting from 1 April 2019, new end date 31 March 2023, extended due to COVID-19

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Overview

Numerous studies show the need to design interventions for psychoactive substance (PS) users, not only from a biomedical angle, but also to act upon the different types of vulnerabilities users face. The general aim of this transnational Canadian, French and Belgian study is to better understand how gender and life stages influence addiction, health risks, and recovery trajectories – in order to guide the development of integrated services that address complex social and health care needs. The three specific objectives of the project take into account gender and life stages issues in order to: 1) identify specific vulnerabilities and capacities in people with SUD who faced with an accumulation of problems over a lifelong trajectory of PS use and related risk behaviors; 2) understand long-term service and recovery trajectories related to PS use and health risks within this population; and 3) guide the development of long-term integrated services that better address the complex social and health needs of this population. GENDER-ARP proposes to combine the following methods: semi-structured interviews on PS use, health-risk and recovery trajectories; a systematic literature review about best practices for gender-responsive addiction and harm reduction long-term integrated services; and consensus development conferences with expert panels. This transnational study will develop contextualised knowledge that can enhance gender-responsive services taking into account life stages, locally and internationally, adapted to the complex care and social needs of specific vulnerable populations.

Progress to date

As part of the project, a transversal objective of mobilizing project partners was achieved. GENDER-ARP uses participatory research methods to foster stakeholder involvement by including representatives of self-help groups (mutual aid, peer, and activist groups), psychoactive substance (PS) users, clinicians, and other key stakeholders in advisory committee and expert panels. A number of graduate students have also been involved since the start of the project. This mobilization of stakeholders has fostered both national and international networking. Moreover, Karine Bertrand was successful in obtaining a four-year research chair grant (CIHR Research Chair in Sex and Gender Science, 2020-2024) in gender and intervention in addiction, which will strengthen partnerships with collaborators involved in GENDER-ARP.

Impact of COVID-19

Data collection was suspended from March to July 2020. GENDER-ARP has obtained ethical approval to conduct research interviews remotely. To date, forty remote interviews have been conducted. This is 38 more remote interviews conducted since the last monitoring fact sheet. Based on the experience of the research staff and peer researchers who conducted the interviews, this method appears adequate given the current circumstances and is adapted to the population under study.

Project partners kept in touch by email and phone in order to maintain links and also to document the issues they were facing during the social and health crisis.

Team members

	Woman	Man	Other
Gender balance in the whole consortium	22 (63%)	13 (37%)	0 (0%)
Presence of women as lead researchers/PIs	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)
Gender Experts in the team	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)
Subsequent team members trained (Gender equality and/or IGAR)	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	0 (0%)



Contribution to the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The GENDER-ARP research team took action in the context of COVID-19 and obtained a complementary grant to document the impacts of COVID-19 on people with addictions, taking gender and sexual diversity into account (see results: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52039.html>). These efforts made it possible to develop recommendations to improve the well-being of women and LGBTQ+ people while helping to transform services, in order to better meet the needs of these populations. This complementary project also made it possible to strengthen collaborations with practitioners and partners from various settings who are involved in the Gender-ARP project and to consolidate the project's participatory methods which contribute to reducing inequities in health through the direct participation of concerned individuals in the research and services that concern them. A second grant (CIHR), was obtain to make a follow-up of the impacts of COVID-19 for the same population (second and third waves) and to actualise recommendations to transform services, taking into account the rapid changes of the context during the pandemic. The report will be available in 2022.

Differences/inequalities between women and men highlighted by the project

The interviews have shed light on the realities faced by people with divers sexual and gender identities in relation to issues raised by addiction.

Positive impact of the project on gender equality/scientific evidence on gender in the field

GENDER-ARP aims to a greater recognition of the realities faced by women who use psychoactive substances (PS), acquired through the testimonials they have provided in the context of semi-structured interviews.

More specifically, this project will:

- Contribute to a better understanding of the complex social and health needs of people with SUD who faced with an accumulation of problems, taking into account the influence of gender and life-stage issues.
- Incorporate the voices of people who are rarely included in studies on addiction, which will help orient the development of integrated services relevant to specific needs, such as those of female drug users facing residential instability, trans people, and older people with SUD.
- Increase knowledge about gender issues as they relate to addiction, health risk, and recovery (Greaves et al., 2015), thereby contributing to sex and gender equity in research through its grounding in the framework for gender-transformative health promotion described by Pederson and colleagues (2014).
- Contribute to a better understanding of the social and recovery capital of PS users, through the emphasis that this project places on this type of experience-based expertise.
- Help improve practices: the rigorous guideline development process, oriented by a participatory research approach, will facilitate the integration of research findings into clinical practice as the research progresses.

Socio-economic impact; involvement of policy makers/civil society

Community partners working in harm reduction and specialised addiction care participated in several meetings with the PIs to help orient the research project (<https://www.gender-arp.com/nos-travaux>). They will also be called upon to guide knowledge transfer strategies.

An open letter was published in a major Canadian newspaper to challenge decision-makers in Canada to better support addiction services in the context of a pandemic by, in particular, considering the needs of women and LGBTQ+ people (<https://www.lapresse.ca/debats/opinions/2020-11-06/dependance-en-contexte-de-covid-19/des-services-essentiels-a-ne-pas-negliger.php>).

Plain language reports and summaries dealing with how to adapt addiction services in the context of a health crisis, while also taking gender account, were also produced as part of GENDER-ARP complementary project (<https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52039.html>).

