



RESEARCH GUIDE

This resource provides useful information on the following topics:

- What is **GBA+**?
- **GBA+** research starts with gender and goes beyond
- The value of **GBA+** research
- The links between **GBA+** and other research approaches
- **GBA+** research tips

WHAT IS GBA+?

Gender-Based Analysis+ (GBA+) is a method for examining the intersection of sex and gender with other identity factors. When applied to government work, GBA+ can aid us in understanding how Canadian women and men experience public policy.

Government policies, programs and legislation can have significant impacts on people's lives, but without the proper tools, decision-makers and policy analysts are unable to identify and analyze these effects.

GBA+ provides this critical information by pointing out differences between women and men, as well as among diverse groups of the same gender. **GBA+** ensures that the impacts and potential impacts of policies and programs can be identified and have fair and intended results across the population.

GBA+ ensures the inclusion of *both* men and women. Moreover, it draws on the insights of 'intersectionality,' a research and policy model that recognizes the complex composition of factors that shape and influence human lives. Intersectional analysis attempts to “examine the consequences of interacting inequalities on people occupying different social locations as well as address the way that specific acts and policies address the inequalities experienced by various groups” (Bishwarma, Hunt & Zajicek, 2007, p. 9).

Recognizing that no-one is shaped by gender alone, **GBA+** takes into account how gender interacts with identity factors, such as ethnicity, age, ability, geography and other aspects of identity among individuals and within broader social structures. **GBA+** thus challenges notions of sameness among groups of women and of men.

By looking beyond only the gendered impacts of policies, programs and legislation, **GBA+** more effectively responds to the challenges of an increasingly diversified Canadian population.

GBA+ RESEARCH STARTS WITH GENDER AND GOES BEYOND

In determining current policy contexts and potential impacts of decisions on diverse groups of women and men, it may be necessary to collect additional information. However, **GBA+** research is not about adding an extra layer to existing research practices but about enhancing current methodologies.

GBA+ research is sensitive to the interaction of gender with other social categories. It also produces data that is disaggregated not only on the basis of sex but on other important social variables.

In fact, the traditional emphasis in research on single factors, such as gender or socio-economic status, has been the subject of growing scrutiny. While researchers may find it easier to place people into single categories (e.g., man or

woman), their findings will not accurately represent the complexity of individual people's lives or the growing diversity within the Canadian population.

GBA+ research, drawing on the intersectionality model, produces more accurate knowledge and evidence about how people actually live their lives. As a guide to research, **GBA+** enables researchers to consider the following:

GBA+

demonstrates WHY and HOW certain social categories and social experiences should be included in any given research project.

- Multiple aspects of identity are dynamic and socially constructed (gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and ability are fluid and flexible);
- Multiple aspects of identity do not operate in isolation but are interactive (e.g., gender is both shaped and influenced by other factors);
- No one aspect of identity is necessarily more important than any other (e.g., even if gender is considered in a research project, it may not be as important as other aspects); and
- Each issue or problem under investigation requires a different set of aspects of identity (e.g., sometimes it might be gender, ethnicity and class; other times it could be geography, gender and ability, etc).

THE VALUE OF GBA+ RESEARCH

GBA+ has the potential to:

- Consider the whole person, including multiple aspects of identity not limited to gender.
- Clarify diversity in women's and men's lives based on factors such as ethnicity, age, class, geography and sexual orientation.
- Generate crucial information about the range of needs, priorities, capacities, experiences, interests and views of differently situated women and men.

- Identify barriers and negative impacts of policies, programs and legislation related to gender and other aspects of identity.
- Allow government policy and program design to take into account the various factors that impact upon diverse groups of women and men.
- Ensure policies and programs apply to a more significant portion of the population.
- Recognize and accommodate human rights and support all citizens in fully realizing their potential as members of Canadian society.

THE LINKS BETWEEN GBA+ AND OTHER RESEARCH APPROACHES

GBA+ has certain features in common with many other research methods, including health determinant approaches, community-based research and Indigenous methodologies. In the realm of health, for example, a **GBA+** overlaps with well-established approaches to understanding and responding to health inequities.

The Public Health Agency of Canada¹ recognizes 12 determinants of health that represent a myriad of social, cultural, environmental, genetic and biological factors: income and social status; social support networks; education and literacy; employment/working conditions; social environments; physical environments; personal health practices and coping skills; healthy child development; biology and genetic endowment; health services; gender; and culture.

¹ For more information visit www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/index-eng.php#determinants



Researchers and policy makers have long investigated the intersection of these determinants and their effects on human health outcomes. Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized that the social determinants of health – the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health care system – are mostly responsible for health inequities (2008).

GBA+ and ‘social determinants of health’ approaches thus both recognize the multiple dynamic factors that influence the lives of individuals. Both also recognize the need to understand and respond to these factors in overall efforts to eliminate inequality, including gender inequality.

GBA+ RESEARCH TIPS

There is no one formula or method for instituting a GBA+ research framework. There are, however, a number of guiding questions that can assist in the design, undertaking or evaluation of policy oriented research, beginning with the development of the research question itself.

Literature Review

To determine the available evidence in any area of policy and to inform the design of an effective research project, it is essential to undertake a literature review. Data are available through the Census, Statistics Canada surveys, administrative databases, academic databases and ‘grey literature,’ which covers scientific and technical reports, patent documents, conference papers, internal reports, government documents, newsletters, fact sheets and unpublished theses and dissertations. Ideally, the evidence gathering process will draw on both quantitative and qualitative data and focus on developments within the last five years.



It is also important to consult, where possible and applicable, relevant internal and external stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations with relevant knowledge. In addition, important information can be obtained by consulting those with expertise in a wide range of policy fields.

Once all the relevant research has been identified and obtained, a critical review of the evidence must occur to determine:

- What is known about the policy issue or problem and what are the gaps in knowledge about different populations of women and men;
- The extent to which attention to diversity is reflected in the research and whether the analysis is objective or biased and perpetuating stereotypes;
- Which factors and aspects of identity have been taken into account;
- The extent to which addressing diversity in the sample would have yielded different findings.

A map of the available information will form the foundation for the development of the research design, including determining the exact focus of the proposed research.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What policy problems and systemic barriers related to gender and other aspects of identity are addressed by the research?

What are the current gaps in knowledge in terms of inclusion of diverse groups of women and men?

Who is being studied? What population is being compared to whom? Why?

If the phenomenon under investigation affects both women and men, does the research explicitly question (or assume) the homogeneity of the two? Also, does it accurately capture the perspectives, experiences and needs of diverse population groups?



Research Tools and Analysis

GBA+ recognizes that knowledge comes in many forms and is therefore compatible with quantitative and qualitative approaches as well as a combination of the two. In all cases, however, GBA+ requires different approaches to aspects of identity (especially gender), their meanings and their consequences.

Tools

- Can highly correlated individual factors be combined to explore statistical intersections (for quantitative research)?
- Does the sample represent the experiences of a diverse group of women and men for whom the issue under study is relevant?
- Do the research instruments support the gathering of data for disaggregation by gender as well as by relevant sub-groups? (samples must be heterogeneous to fully explore multiple categories of analysis and how they intersect)
- Is the tool suited to collecting micro or macro data or a combination of both.

Design

- Does the research design explicitly identify and define aspects of identity, including gender, for inclusion and also provide a rationale for their inclusion?
- Does the research design distinguish between gender and women?
- Does the research design include factors in addition to gender (e.g. ethnicity, geography, socio-economic status, ability, Aboriginal and immigrant status)?
- Does the design adequately address issues of diversity among women and men? This would necessitate the design's potential to investigate differences among men and women and not just between them.
- Did the department seek input, where possible and applicable, from relevant academics and other non-governmental organizations?

Quantitative Methods

This empirical model examines the cause-and-effect relationship between independent factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, social class and so on) and dependent factors to produce macro level population data. The key challenges of a quantitative research approach for **GBA+** are the following:

1. Concepts such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability and so on are socially constructed; new categories are constantly created and definitions are ever-changing.
2. Aspects of identity are usually analyzed separately for their relative impact on the phenomenon of interest, frequently at the cost of examining the intersection of independent and dependent variables of interest.
3. There is a shortage of statistical methods that can be used to explore complex intersections. Further, to explore all possible subsets of every relevant social group would yield results that have little or no meaning to a given project.
4. Traditionally, the dominant group in a culture (e.g., white males) is the comparison point for every other category, resulting in limited comparisons of sub-groups on the topic of interest.

For quantitative methods to be consistent with the requirements of **GBA+**, researchers can use a variety of strategies.

1. Focus on traditionally neglected groups. For example, consider who is typically included in a factor (e.g. gender) and how that factor is shaped by ethnicity, class, geography and sexuality (Cole 2009).

2. Rethink gender as structural categories and social processes rather than primarily the characteristics of individuals (Cole 2009). This may lead to studies of the combined effects of gender and other factors of identity, such as geographic context and location.

3. Find ways to explore statistical intersections by combining individual but highly correlated aspects of identity into a single factor. For example, immigrant status and visible minority status are highly correlated and can be combined to assess a dependent variable such as educational outcome (Wilkinson 2003).

Qualitative Methods

The strength of qualitative methods such as ethnography, neighbourhood studies, participatory action research, historical analyses, structured interviews, textual analyses of media resources, and so on allow for the in-depth study of individuals' unique social locations and experiences. The key challenges of a qualitative research approach for **GBA+** are the following:

1. How to ask questions that generate knowledge about intersecting experiences.
2. The time required to analyze and interpret an often significant volume of data.
3. The quality of the data analysis, which is dependent on individual research knowledge of the importance and consequences of intersecting social categories and the socio-historical realities of historically oppressed groups (Bowleg 2008).
4. The need to make persuasive the value of qualitative research for producing reliable evidence for policy and programs.

At the same time, qualitative research is recognized for its potential to generate detailed information about individuals and their social lives, thus providing a deeper understanding of the intersections of diversity, including but not limited to gender. The method, by drawing on individual experiences, is particularly effective for identifying which differences and similarities exist, and why they matter.

Mixed Methods

Regardless of which method is chosen, in presenting research data and findings it is important to consider:

1. How is the data presented and analyzed? (e.g. are data gaps identified?)
2. Is disaggregation based solely on gender (i.e. two separate groupings with no attention to differences within each group)?
3. Are gender roles or other identities of subpopulation groups presented in absolute terms?
4. What does the information convey about the positive or negative impact of the policy on different groups of women and men?
5. Are harmful stereotypes perpetuated? Are any particular groups unfairly stigmatized?

Combining data obtained through quantitative and qualitative analysis allows researchers to come to a better understanding of how certain life situations and social barriers affect social positions, experiences and needs relating to policy.

In summary, **GBA+** is a prerequisite to effective and efficient policy because it allows policymakers to control more precisely the effects of any policy. It also ensures public accountability and credibility. Without question, **GBA+** is a best practice in modern policy work.

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