Commentary on the new sex and gender editorial policy of the *Canadian Journal of Public Health*

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ABSTRACT

While the concepts of both “sex” and “gender” are widely recognized as important considerations in health research, the presence of these and other key determinants of health in research findings remains quite variable in the published literature. In an effort to close this knowledge gap in relation to the implications of both sex and gender in the public health research evidence base, the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (CJPH) has recently adopted an editorial policy requiring authors to ensure that their manuscripts speak to these concepts, where applicable. In keeping with the international trend in sex and gender reporting in health research, the aim of this policy shift is for CJPH to continue to advance excellence in the field of public health research, policy and practice in Canada and internationally.

KEY WORDS: Gender research design; editorial policies

La traduction du résumé se trouve à la fin de l'article.

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The importance of the concepts of “sex” and “gender” has continued to factor into health research discussions, debates and methodologies both nationally and internationally.^{1–3} In the Canadian context, the concept of “sex” in research has been problematized and reimagined by a variety of proponents, including, for example, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). This earlier work was aimed, in part, at addressing the longstanding “sex bias” related to the exclusion of female participants from research and the problematic extrapolation of research findings from male research subjects to entire populations. More recently, the use of both sex and gender as key research concepts has become recognized and formally adopted in health research funding policies by, for example, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).² In both instances, SSHRC and CIHR regard these concepts as vital to advancing our research knowledge base in an effort to help inform appropriate sex- and gender-based policy, practice and programmatic responses to a wide array of health and social issues.

While many earlier efforts were aimed specifically at seeking conceptual and methodological clarity in the use of the terms “sex” and “gender” in health research, the importance of considering the overlapping and intersecting nature of other key modifiable determinants of health (e.g., income, housing) and non-modifiable determinants of health (e.g., genetics, race) has been less well recognized, integrated and formalized into research funding processes and publication policies. As this increasing awareness of the importance of sex and gender continues to help shape and inform the knowledge base in Canada, there is a need to ensure that we continue to move beyond these homogenized dichotomies (e.g., male/female, men/women) in our research and publishing efforts to fully understand the intersectional axes of oppression that contribute to poor health and social outcomes.^{3,4} In other words, rather than regarding sex and gender as both

conceptually and practically unique concepts in health research, there is a need to consider the integration of other relative factors that can contribute to a fuller understanding of health inequities and related health outcomes. Recognizing the intersectional nature of health outcomes, including social differentiation beyond gender and sex, many health researchers are advocating for greater evidence-informed decision-making in addressing persistent health inequities.^{4–9}

As an initial effort to address sex and gender in public health research, the *Canadian Journal of Public Health* (CJPH) has recently adopted an editorial policy that asks authors to address the relevance of sex and gender in their submissions, where applicable. While this most recent policy shift focuses specifically on sex and gender considerations in public health research findings, the importance of other intersecting factors in advancing our understanding of the health of populations cannot be ignored. In keeping with the mandate of the CJPH in striving for excellence in public health research, considerations of sex and gender are integral in advancing “public health research and practice in Canada and around the world, thus contributing to the improvement of the health of populations and the reduction of health inequalities”. This first step with the new CJPH policy will be to require authors to speak to the ways in which sex (biological considerations) and gender (socio-cultural considerations) are presented in their study findings. Specifically, the CJPH Editorial

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Board now requires all authors to answer the following questions as part of the manuscript submission process:

1. Are sex (biological) considerations taken into account in this manuscript? Yes/No
2. Are gender (socio-cultural) considerations taken into account in this manuscript? Yes/No
3. If YES, please describe how sex and/or gender considerations are considered in your manuscript (2000 character limit).
4. If NO, please explain why sex and/or gender considerations are not applicable in your manuscript.

This shift will necessarily require both authors and reviewers to consider the complex ways in which these determinants of health contribute to advancing the evidence base from which public health in Canada informs, for example, best practices in the provision of care. In moving forward, the new CJPH editorial policy will help ensure that the reporting of research findings includes, where relevant, the implications of sex and gender in an effort to advance excellence in public health in Canada.

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RÉSUMÉ

Les concepts de « sexe » et de « genre » sont largement reconnus comme étant des éléments à considérer dans la recherche en santé, mais leur présence et celle d'autres grands déterminants de la santé dans les résultats de recherche varie encore beaucoup dans les travaux publiés. Afin de combler cette lacune en ce qui a trait aux conséquences du sexe et du genre dans les fondements scientifiques de la recherche en santé publique, la *Revue canadienne de santé publique* (RCSP) a récemment adopté une politique éditoriale demandant aux auteurs de s'assurer que leurs manuscrits abordent ces concepts, s'il y a lieu. Dans la continuité de la tendance internationale à faire état du sexe et du genre dans la recherche en santé, ce changement de politique vise à ce que la RCSP continue de favoriser l'excellence dans le domaine de la recherche, des politiques et des pratiques en santé publique au Canada et à l'étranger.

MOTS CLÉS : conception de la recherche sur le genre; politiques éditoriales