

Summary of evidence about economic, health, and social inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada

Submitted to Women and Gender Equality Canada



August 2022

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This report was prepared in partnership with

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Published in 2022 by the Social Research and
Demonstration Corporation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
This project	2
PHASE 1: COMPREHENSIVE LGBTQ2S+ DATA SCOPING	3
Purpose	3
Methods	3
Findings	4
Recommendations	5
PHASE 2: POPULATION-LEVEL DATA LINKAGE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS	8
Purpose	8
Methods	8
Findings	9
Recommendations	11
PHASE 3: IN-DEPTH QUALITATIVE STUDY	12
Purpose	12
Methods	12
Findings	13
Implications	16
KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION	18
PROJECT IMPLICATIONS	20
Conceptual framework of factors influencing employment and labour market outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada	20
Conclusions	22
WORKS CITED	24

INTRODUCTION

Gender and sexual minorities in Canada – including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQ2S+)^a people – face significant inequities in the labour market. Researchers have reported that LGBTQ2S+ people are more likely to live in poverty, face greater barriers to employment, and earn less at work, despite often having higher levels of education than their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts.¹⁻⁴ In addition, gender and sexual minorities tend to report poorer physical and mental health and face social disadvantages, including greater rates of social exclusion.⁵⁻⁸

Despite these reports, significant knowledge gaps continue to limit our understanding of the labour market outcomes of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Much of the existing research focuses on LGBTQ2S+ individuals as a group, failing to examine differences in experiences within this diverse community. Further, there is still considerable progress to be made in drawing connections between economic, health, and social outcomes for gender and sexual minorities, despite the fact that existing disparities are likely mutually reinforcing.^{9,10} Research on outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ people in Canada that takes an explicitly intersectional approach, recognizing the role of interlocking systems of power and oppression in shaping distinct outcomes, is also scarce.

These gaps can be partially explained by the lack of high-quality data on gender and sexual orientation in Canada, serving as a major barrier to building a comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ2S+ individuals' experiences.¹¹ Overall, LGBTQ2S+ people have not found themselves fulsomely represented in national survey data in Canada; when opportunities to self-identify do exist, questions are frequently limited to sexual orientation.¹² One major implication of this is that gender minority individuals (including those who identify as transgender, non-binary, or genderqueer) are often excluded from self-identifying, and remain invisible in most population-level research. Moreover, many studies rely on samples of same-sex couples. This results in the exclusion of single LGBTQ2S+ individuals, the ongoing reliance on sex rather than gender as a measure, and the methodological erasure of bisexual individuals through the aggregation of bisexual people with gay and lesbian or heterosexual people on the basis of partnership.¹¹

^a While this report uses LGBTQ2S+ to refer to gender and sexual minority individuals as a community, we acknowledge that terminology is constantly evolving and that others may prefer other acronyms (e.g., 2SLGBTQIA+, LGBT, LBTTQQIAAP). The "+" in LGBTQ2S+ intends to convey the inclusion of gender and sexual minority individuals whose identities may not be explicitly represented in this acronym. Further, we recognize the challenges of using one term to convey a rich diversity of gender and sexual identities, and associated experiences and outcomes. Where feasible and appropriate, we refer to specific groups or sub-groups (e.g., trans people, bisexual people) throughout this report.

Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy identifies LGBTQ2S+ people as being at greater risk of poverty, and aims to address barriers that prevent LGBTQ2S+ people from equal participation in the labour market as one means of alleviating income insecurity.¹³ In this context, the existing gaps in both data and knowledge point to the need for research that identifies key contributors to economic outcomes for gender and sexual minorities, with a view to positioning these outcomes within a broader framework that also considers health and social inequities. There is also value in mapping these outcomes and their determinants in relation to Canada's current data landscape, and making recommendations for future population-level surveys to help expedite this type of research. This project, described below, aimed to contribute to these goals.

THIS PROJECT

Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), the multi-phase project *Building the evidence base about economic, health and social inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada* was carried out by the Social Research Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), and led by a core research team composed of white, cisgender sexual minority researchers at intersections of other social locations and lived experiences. The project was conducted in partnership with Pride at Work Canada (PAWC), the Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), and Dr. Sean Waite at the University of Western Ontario. It ran from May 2020 until July 2022, aiming to address four key research questions, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Project research questions

Research question	Relevant phase
What are key determinants of economic and labour market outcomes for LGBTQ2S+-identified individuals in Canada?	1
What nationally, provincially, and/or territorially representative datasets exist that allow for the exploration of the relationship between an LGBTQ2S+ identity and labour market outcomes?	1
What is the association between these determinants and economic outcomes such as labour force status, earnings, household income, and total income?	2
What are the experiences of employment (and career pathways) for LGBTQ2S+-identified individuals who are currently employed?	3

This summary report serves as the final deliverable for the project. It includes: (a) a summary of objectives, methods, and findings from each phase of the project, (b) a summary of knowledge translation activities and products, and (c) implications and conclusions.

PHASE 1: COMPREHENSIVE LGBTQ2S+ DATA SCOPING

PURPOSE

[Phase 1](#) of the project included a comprehensive literature review, key informant interviews, and a data scoping exercise related to economic, health, and social inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals. These were conducted to provide a map of existing research and available data in Canada, including data gaps and opportunities. In particular, Phase 1 had two broader objectives of identifying: (1) databases used for quantitative analyses of gender and sexual minority labour market outcomes in Canada, and (2) key determinants of positive labour market and health/well-being outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ people in Canada. In doing so, we drew from multiple fields of scholarship to respond to five specific question areas:

1. Who are LGBTQ2S+ identified individuals?;
2. What are the economic and labour market outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada?;
3. What are the key determinants of these outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ identified individuals?;
4. What might a conceptual framework of differential labour market outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ people look like?; and
5. What nationally, provincially, and/or territorially representative datasets exist that allow for the exploration of the relationship between an LGBTQ2S+ identity and labour market outcomes?

METHODS

Our research in Phase 1 centred on three methodological components:

1. **A search of peer-reviewed and grey literature** examining the intersection between labour market, economic well-being, health and mental health, and social outcomes for gender and sexual minority individuals in Canada. This search yielded 211 relevant sources.
2. **Key informant interviews** with ten individuals involved in data and research on health, social, and/or economic outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in the Canada at academic and/or non-profit institutions. The purpose of the interviews was to supplement the

literature review to better understand the current data landscape for gender and sexual minorities in Canada and to inform subsequent phases of research.

3. **A data scan** of Statistics Canada and other relevant datasets was designed to build a database of available resources and datasets relevant to labour market outcomes of gender and sexual minorities in Canada. This included an overview of how existing Canadian surveys collect and report on labour market data by gender and sexual minority status.

Through these methods, Phase 1 sought to better understand the key determinants of labour market outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada, and to map the current data landscape, including how information on sexual and gender minority individuals is being collected.

FINDINGS

LGBTQ2S+ identity is complex and contains several distinct but interacting elements related to sexual orientation and gender. The terminology used to describe different identities is constantly evolving.¹⁴ An understanding of LGBTQ2S+ populations must consider the diversity within the community, including the role of intersecting identities and social positions.¹⁵

Poorer economic outcomes are prevalent for gender and sexual minority individuals in Canada. Poverty and homelessness remain pressing issues for LGBTQ2S+ individuals, with existing research pointing to particularly dire outcomes for transgender individuals and those whose experiences are further shaped by racism, ableism, and other systems of power or oppression.^{1,9,16-18} When in employment, available data demonstrate a general hierarchy of earnings on the basis of sexual orientation as well as gender and/or sex, with heterosexual men reporting the highest earnings followed by gay men, lesbian women, bisexual men, heterosexual women, and bisexual women.^{3,4,12,19} Employment earnings data for gender minority individuals is not systematically available.

In addition to earnings, LGBTQ2S+ individuals have distinct outcomes related to other labour market characteristics, including access and attainment, formality and precarity, and type, sector, and location of employment.^{3,4,19} These characteristics serve to partially explain other labour market outcomes. Within employment, the literature also points to LGBTQ2S+ individuals experiencing challenges related to discrimination, concealment, and social or workplace exclusion.^{3,20,21}

Available data point to additional differential outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ individuals, which may be mutually reinforcing with economic and labour market outcomes.²²⁻²⁴ Sexual minority individuals experience poorer mental health outcomes compared to their heterosexual counterparts, with bisexual individuals faring the worst.⁸ The absence of data on gender minority individuals represents a significant knowledge gap.¹²

The explanations for differential outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ individuals are numerous, spanning multiple disparate fields of study. Key mechanisms identified include discrimination (in healthcare, housing, and employment), experiences of prejudice and violence, homo/trans/biphobia, family and parental relationships (and more specifically, a lack thereof), concealment of gender and sexual identity, gender presentation and occupational sorting, geography, family status and formation, and the accumulation of disadvantage over time.

While there is movement towards increased inclusivity in survey measures related to gender and sexual minority identities, limitations remain. At the time of the [Phase 1 report](#), we found an ongoing reliance on binary and biological terms (e.g., male/female) to define both gender and sex, including in Statistics Canada datasets. Measurement of gender diversity at the population-level is extremely limited, including that which allows for the identification of non-binary, genderqueer, and/or Two-Spirit respondents. While several datasets provide the option of identifying as gay/lesbian, heterosexual, or bisexual, other sexual identities (e.g., asexual, pansexual, queer) are typically not included. Questions about outness and/or disclosure regarding both gender and sexual orientation are rare. Population and sample sizes of sexual and gender minorities limit analytical options.

A lack of data on LGBTQ2S+-specific experiences, including research bridging economic, health, and social outcomes, serves as a key barrier to designing programs and interventions to address inequities experienced by this community in Canada.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In comprehensively documenting the data gaps and opportunities with respect the labour market outcomes of gender and sexual minorities in Canada, this phase of the project concluded with a set of recommendations for data development, research, and policy.

Data

- **Address the challenge of small sample sizes, with a view to facilitating the disaggregation of data within the LGBTQ2S+ community and intersectional analyses.** This may be achieved through oversampling gender and sexual minority individuals, as well as collecting more and better data related to other identities and sociodemographic characteristics (including race, Indigeneity, disability, and so on).
- **Standardize the collection of data regarding gender and sexual minority identity across population-level surveys, including those focused on socioeconomic and/or labour market outcomes.**

- **Include more expansive response options for gender, sex, and sexual orientation in population surveys.** Consider the inclusion of intersex as a sex category, non-binary as a gender category, and bisexual/asexual/pansexual/queer as sexual orientation categories. Ensuring trans and non-binary individuals have the opportunity to self-identify is particularly important given the lack of available population-level data on gender minorities.
- **Move away from framing sexual orientation on the basis of partnership unless there is a specific reason to do so.** Framing sexual orientation in terms of identity, attraction, and behaviour is likely to yield different results. In certain instances, it may be valuable to collect several or all of these measures.
- **Explore the addition of new variables in population-level surveys.** Examples of variables for inclusion include those related to gender expression/presentation (e.g., masculinity/androgyny/femininity), lived gender, and outness/disclosure. The need for questions related to group-specific mechanisms is especially important to support intervention research, including questions on discriminatory experiences in the labour market. Data collection in this area could be facilitated via an expanded survey for LGBTQ2S+ individuals.
- **Permit more systematic linkage to tax data from a wider array of population surveys.**
- **Consider additional measures to make data collection more inclusive.** This may include embracing flexibility (e.g., adding or changing language on emerging identity categories), incorporating poverty-related variables that may be more inclusive of certain communities (e.g., cultural impoverishment for Indigenous people), and addressing concerns related to the underrepresentation of homeless or housing-insecure individuals in population surveys.
- **Continue to engage and consult members of the LGBTQ2S+ community in data-related endeavours and proposed changes.**
- **Coordinate with provincial/territorial and municipal stakeholders to standardize the implementation of these and other related recommendations across Canadian surveys.**

Research

- **Expand mixed-methods research, recognizing the value of qualitative research in understanding individuals' holistic experiences as well as enabling intersectional analyses, which is currently limited by the existing data.**
- **Pursue currently understudied research areas.** Specific topics include differential access to services for LGBTQ2S+ individuals as well as decision-making in employment and education among gender and sexual minorities. In terms of populations, there is an

identified need for research on gender minority and bisexual individuals, and LGBTQ2S+ communities that are multiply-marginalized. The importance of **longitudinal research** also emerged in our findings to better understanding long-term outcomes.

- **Prioritize relationship-building in LGBTQ2S+ research.** Recognizing the history of pathologizing and unethical research with LGBTQ2S+ people,^{25,26} work to build trust with LGBTQ2S+ communities. Some individuals may also be reluctant to take part in research for fear being outed. Research with LGBTQ2S+ communities can be an opportunity to “bring the research back,” acknowledging the underrepresentation of these groups in research and policy spaces and the importance of meaningful inclusion in the research process.²⁷
- **In the absence of adequate data, embrace creativity and flexibility.** Recognizing limitations related to data quality and sample sizes, using and reporting the data available can still be highly informative. For example, while acknowledging limitations, there is the value in pursuing analysis using an intersectional lens despite small sample sizes.
- **Support efforts towards more interdisciplinarity in research.** Bridging the gap between social, health, and economic research is an important step, particularly given the knowledge that the outcomes and their underlying mechanisms do not operate separately.

Policy

- **Include gender and sexual minority individuals as a protected class within the Employment Equity Act.**²⁸ This may also contribute to better and more standard data collection about LGBTQ2S+ individuals, particularly in the context of the labour market.
- **Place greater emphasis on mechanisms underlying the observed inequities as expressed by LGBTQ2S+ individuals.** Being able to identify, share, and explain the specific causes of differential outcomes (for instance, in anti-discrimination training) is important to identifying group-specific factors, and may result in the prescription of different solutions.
- **Consider ways to bridge policy and data landscapes related to labour market and economic outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ individuals.** Engage policymakers in conversations about data, and vice versa, to inform ways to improve outcomes for this population.
- **Several tangible recommendations related to LGBTQ2S+ inclusion in the workplace emerged from the literature review, targeted at employers in particular.** Refer to the cited sources for these recommendations.^{21,29-31}

Finally, the findings from this phase of research were used to inform quantitative work conducted by our team in the subsequent Phase 2.

PHASE 2: POPULATION-LEVEL DATA LINKAGE AND QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

PURPOSE

In light of the existing data and research gaps, the [Phase 2](#) of the project consisted of a quantitative study of the relationship between sexual orientation and economic, health, and social outcomes in the Canadian context. The study used data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and the T1 Family File (T1FF) to examine the following research questions:

1. How do self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals differ from their heterosexual counterparts in terms of their sociodemographic, employment, and health and well-being characteristics?;
2. What are the differences in employment outcomes for LGB individuals in Canada compared to their heterosexual counterparts?; and
3. Which variables drive the earnings differences between LGB individuals in Canada compared to their heterosexual counterparts?

METHODS

For each respondent, we linked data from the CCHS (cycles 2.1 [2003], 3.1 [2005], and 2007 to 2018) to T1FF files (available from 2003 to 2017) of the same year. Given the absence of data on gender minorities, analyses focused on individuals self-identifying as LGB disaggregated by sex, with heterosexual men as the reference group. While posing some limitations, this approach allowed us to present some of the highest-quality income data on sexual minority individuals available in Canada to date.

The analyses comprised three main components: (1) descriptive analyses of the differences in characteristics of sexual minority (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) individuals compared to heterosexual individuals along sociodemographic, employment, and health and well-being characteristics; (2) a series of regression analyses to estimate the relationship between employment outcomes and sexual orientation, controlling for known determinants; and (3) decomposition analysis of the difference in annual earnings for sexual minority groups and heterosexual individuals at the mean total income as well as across quantiles. Note that we

employed the term ‘drivers’ to refer to possible mechanisms underlying the observed relationships, without implying causality to our findings.

FINDINGS

Sexual minorities earn less compared with heterosexual men

All sexual minority respondent groups had significantly lower median annual earnings compared with heterosexual men. In descriptive analyses, heterosexual men were found to earn the most (\$55,959), followed by gay men (\$50,822), lesbian women (\$44,740), bisexual men (\$31,776), and bisexual women (\$25,290). Controlling for a variety of covariates, earnings gaps remained for lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals compared to heterosexual men, but also an earnings advantage for lesbian women versus heterosexual women. Earnings gaps were most pronounced for bisexual men and women. The final multivariate model pointed to a hierarchy of annual employment earnings from high to low as follows: heterosexual men, gay men, lesbian women, bisexual men/heterosexual women, and bisexual women. These findings, given the context of the high-quality income data used, offer further evidence of the ongoing wage disparities faced by sexual minorities in Canada, particularly among those who self-identify as bisexual.

Sexual minorities experience inequities in health and socioeconomic outcomes, with differences between groups

Overall, sexual minority respondents, and especially bisexual men and women, reported lower levels of general and mental health, as well as increased stress, food insecurity, and involvement in behaviours such as smoking and drinking compared with their heterosexual counterparts. Sexual minority respondents also reported significantly lower rates of life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and community belonging. In particular, bisexual men and women consistently reported the lowest rates of life satisfaction and community belonging across all groups. Bisexual women reported the lowest rates of job satisfaction.

Similar patterns emerged in our analyses of labour market outcomes. All sexual minority groups were less likely to be employed and, if employed, to work full-time compared with heterosexual men. Bisexual men and women reported the lowest rates of full-time employment; they were also more likely to work fewer hours per week compared to all groups. These findings pointed to group-level disparities experienced by sexual minorities, underscoring the need to avoid treating the LGB – and, more broadly, the LGBTQ2S+ – community as a single entity. The findings also supported the notion that bisexual-identified people face distinct barriers to attaining positive economic, social, and health outcomes.

Drivers of earnings disparities are diverse, and interconnected with mental health, but some of the gap remains unexplained

The decomposition analysis identified industry, mental health, and labour supply as key drivers of earnings differences, with demographics (e.g., age, immigration status, race, province of residence) also playing a role. Regarding industry, we found an underrepresentation of sexual minorities in high-paying occupations, such as management as well as trades and transportation. The literature points to industry sorting on the basis of real or perceived discrimination as potential explanations.¹⁹ The role played by labour supply (hours worked) is consistent with existing literature, suggesting gay men and lesbian women work less and more hours, respectively, compared with their heterosexual peers, with bisexual individuals working the fewest hours.

For gay men, compositional differences entirely explained any wage differences compared with heterosexual men. For bisexual men, 67 per cent of the earnings gap was explained by differences in demographic characteristics, household composition, hours of work, and well-being. The unexplained part of the earnings gap was attributed to differences in returns to education. For lesbian women compared with heterosexual men, the compositional differences in demographic characteristics, education, hours worked, industry, and mental health explained approximately 89 per cent of the earnings gap. The earnings gap between bisexual women and heterosexual men was mainly driven by differences in demographics, household composition, hours worked, current student status, industry, and well-being. Lesbian women's earnings "advantage" in comparison to heterosexual women was driven by differences in demographics, parent status, hours worked, occupation, and mental health.

The findings suggested that several common factors drive earnings gaps for some, but not all, sexual minority groups. They also supported the interconnected nature of socioeconomic and health outcomes, as well as the importance of holistic approaches to addressing inequities. The identification of mental health as a primary driver of sexual orientation earnings gaps in the decomposition analysis was among this study's more novel findings, pointing to the need for policy responses that consider socioeconomic and health outcomes in tandem.

Substantial data gaps limit our understanding of the full LGBTQ2S+ community

We were unable to measure the experiences of gender minority individuals using currently available data. This represents a significant limitation to this phase of research, particularly given the importance of recognizing the diversity in experiences among gender and sexual minority individuals. In addition, population surveys lack questions that are likely relevant for the LGBTQ2S+ community, including those about partnership status, outness and disclosure in

different domains (e.g., work, home, etc.), gender expression and presentation, workplace experiences, and perceived and anticipated instances of discrimination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our findings suggest that, as a group, sexual minorities in Canada continue to face persistent and inequitable outcomes across a range of domains compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Many of the recommendations from the [Phase 1 report](#) remained relevant at this stage. This is particularly true for those related to data, including the consistent collection of information about gender minority respondents and more expansive response options related to sex, gender, and sexual orientation. That said, building on all the project findings to date, we outlined the following recommendations:

- **Explore further potential drivers of socioeconomic and health outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ individuals.** The mechanisms of inequity are likely to differ among gender and sexual minority individuals, yet research and policy often target the outcomes rather than the underlying factors leading to them. As the data in Phase 1 have suggested, drivers of inequity for bisexual men and women are not well-established, creating challenges to design policies or interventions to support these groups.
- **Pursue interventions that are multi-sectoral and group-specific in nature.** The Phase 1 findings have reaffirmed the relationship between the health, social, and economic/employment domains in LGBTQ2S+ individuals' lives. They have also demonstrated differing outcomes among LGB individuals, pointing to the value of targeted or tailored interventions. Specific policy and organizational interventions contributing to positive workplace outcomes were explored more deeply in Phase 3.
- **Support research and data collection on specific subpopulations within the LGBTQ2S+ community.** This recommendation may be particularly relevant for individuals about whom we have the least data or existing research, namely bisexual and gender minority individuals. For instance, the federal government might consider the value of a specific population-level survey for gender minority individuals that can be similarly linked to other datasets, with a view to more effectively understanding their experiences and outcomes.
- **Promote the inclusion of questions about workplace and employment-related experiences in national surveys.** These may include questions about social environments and networks at work, experiences of discrimination in hiring and retention, and other variables that might facilitate a more nuanced picture of all respondents' experiences in the labour market, including those who identify as gender and/or sexual minorities.

PHASE 3: IN-DEPTH QUALITATIVE STUDY

PURPOSE

Recognizing both the absence of and value in qualitative research in this area, Phase 3 of the project comprised an in-depth qualitative research study of the labour market experiences of LGBTQ2S+ individuals across Canada. The research focused on the lived experiences of the research participants, including their personal employment journeys, the connections they made between those experiences, and their perceptions of underlying causes and implications. The findings, summarized in the [Phase 3 report](#), sought to offer readers a nuanced and in-depth view of LGBTQ2S+ individuals' experiences in employment, key factors influencing employment inequities, and the contributors to positive workplace experiences, which have remained largely undocumented in research to date.³²

Findings from this phase of research were relevant for diverse audiences and stakeholders, including employers, service providers, researchers, policymakers, LGBTQ2S+ individuals themselves, and others concerned with the labour market experiences and outcomes of equity-deserving populations. Employers and service providers working within employment may gain insights into how to recruit and better support LGBTQ2S+ employees, with potential implications for employee satisfaction, turnover, and productivity. Researchers may benefit from the study's deeper engagement with the qualitative labour market experiences of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada, including among bisexual and gender-diverse individuals, for whom research is especially lacking. The study may also serve as a resource for policymakers and government stakeholders in informing policy and program interventions that can meaningfully address the systemic inequities experienced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals in employment and other spheres. Our intention was for LGBTQ2S+ readers to see themselves reflected in these findings, to find value in these shared experiences, and to be equipped with greater knowledge to support them in their own employment journeys. Finally, the findings may offer non-LGBTQ2S+ readers a better understanding of their LGBTQ2S+ peers' and colleagues' experiences, including how to establish and grow their allyship practice at work and elsewhere.

METHODS

This qualitative study drew on data gathered through in-depth interviews and focus groups. Self-identified LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada who were between the ages of 18-59 and currently or recently (i.e., within two years) employed were recruited primarily through Pride at Work Canada's employer and community partner networks. Recognizing the rich diversity within the

LGBTQ2S+ community, we actively sought participants representing a wide range of social locations, regions, occupations, labour market sectors, and industries. The study drew on the voices of 34 participants who participated in either interviews (n=12), focus groups (n=7), or both (n=15). In total, we spoke with 27 participants in interviews, and 22 in focus groups.

Interviews focused on individuals' positive and negative labour market experiences, career decision-making and trajectories, and facilitators or barriers to attaining and maintaining employment. Focus groups were leveraged as a space to expand on, validate, and co-interpret findings from interviews, as well as to explore potential solutions in a group setting. Data analysis used iterative thematic coding. Participants were offered the opportunity to review and edit their quotes and how they were described in this report. The study received approval from the Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board.

FINDINGS

Employment experiences of LGBTQ2S+ individuals

Accessing and maintaining employment

Prejudice and discrimination emerged as key themes in participants' experiences accessing and maintaining employment, particularly with respect to hiring, remuneration, and retention. Participants also shared experiences of discriminatory treatment by colleagues, managers, and clients, including harassment and refusal to work with LGBTQ2S+ employees. While these experiences were attributed to participants' gender and/or sexual identity, they were also attributed to other characteristics or social locations, such as race, age, or ability.

Day-to-day experiences on the job

Participants from diverse occupational and socio-demographic backgrounds recounted numerous and repeated microaggressions in day-to-day employment contexts, illustrating the pervasiveness of such experiences. While the types of microaggressions took varied forms, five overarching types of experiences emerged as especially prevalent: 1) cisheteronormative^b interactions and encounters; 2) prejudicial attitudes; 3) stigmatized and sexualized lifestyles and relationships; 4) the undermining and discounting of skills, experience, and authority; and

^b Cisheteronormativity refers to the deeply entrenched belief that gender is binary, that everyone's gender aligns with their sex assigned at birth, and that heterosexuality is the norm.

5) workplace social exclusion. These day-to-day experiences were often underpinned by the burden, stress, and associated risks of identity disclosure for LGBTQ2S+ employees.

Navigating a career

LGBTQ2S+ employees described the need to constantly navigate complex – and often inequitable – systems and structures within employment, which fundamentally shaped their careers. An overarching sense of precarity of work and income insecurity complicated the employment journeys of many LGBTQ2S+ individuals we spoke with. Furthermore, participants described extensive and detailed processes they used to negotiate safety and inclusion in career decision-making, requiring significant investment of skill, time, and resources. Cisheteronormative systems, policies, and infrastructure also emerged as a key theme constraining LGBTQ2S+ individuals' employment and career choices.

Cumulative experiences across social locations, life domains, and life course

Participants' experiences in employment were shaped by their diverse social locations both in addition to, and in combination with, their gender and sexual identities. Similarly, the factors – and particularly disadvantages – they described as driving their experiences in the labour market were inextricably linked to experiences in other life domains, such as education, housing, or health care. Importantly, participant accounts underscored the relationship between cumulative disadvantage over the life course and negative employment experiences at each stage along the way. Early life experiences of LGBTQ2S+ people were frequently characterized by bias and disadvantage, with long-standing economic impacts.

Key factors influencing employment inequities

Prejudice and discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination emerged as drivers of employment inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals, negatively influencing hiring, remuneration, retention, and advancement. Participants routinely described discriminatory systems and practices on the part of organizations, employers, clients, and coworkers that negatively affected their employment trajectories. Yet most participants described it being very difficult to demonstrate that they had been discriminated against (e.g., in a dismissal or lost job opportunity) on the basis of gender or sexual identity. For those experiencing discrimination in a workplace, reporting these instances to management in some cases compounded their negative experiences.

Heteronormativity and cisnormativity

The vast majority of participants asserted that workplaces underpinned by heteronormativity and cisnormativity remained the status quo, such that LGBTQ2S+ people's lives and identities were seen as inappropriate for or incompatible with workplace expectations. Specifically, overwhelmingly cisheteronormative environments can lead employers to marginalize LGBTQ2S+ employees intentionally or unintentionally through the concept of "job fit." We heard that being "out" at work carried a high risk of being perceived and described as having "poor fit" within a position or an organization. In turn, "poor fit" had negative impacts in key areas of social and professional networks and training and advancement opportunities, sometimes resulting in LGBTQ2S+ individuals leaving their positions.

Constrained choices

LGBTQ2S+ employees' sense of choice was constrained when it came to making and pursuing employment-related decisions. Educational barriers, economic precarity, and in particular, the absence of safe and inclusive job opportunities substantially limited their options as jobseekers or employees, resulting in wage inequities, job insecurity, and reduced job mobility. This meant participants had to make key trade-offs when seeking work or advancement, and in decisions to leave their jobs or work sectors. Importantly, other factors such as discrimination often contributed to the sense of constrained choices, pointing to the interconnected, multi-level, and systemic nature of the drivers of inequitable employment outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ individuals.

Repeated exposure to discrimination, prejudice, and microaggressions

The vast majority of LGBTQ2S+ participants described witnessing and experiencing prejudice, microaggressions, and discrimination in the labour market. Over time, observing, encountering, and navigating these situations had a cumulative effect, with negative implications for their mental health and well-being. In some instances, these experiences had tangible effects on workplace performance and confidence, with consequences for outcomes like pay and advancement. Guarding, concealing, and coding were identified as tactics to avoid and respond to ongoing negative treatment based on gender and sexual identity.

Contributors to positive workplace experiences

Inclusive leadership, committed allies, and LGBTQ2S+ community at work

Many participants described directors, supervisors, and managers who were explicitly and genuinely committed to LGBTQ2S+ equity as essential to fostering safer and more inclusive

workplace environments – as well as improved outcomes – for LGBTQ2S+ employees. In fact, some described inclusive leadership as a protective factor against experiences of discrimination on the job. Several also spoke to the positive effects of working with non-LGBTQ2S+ allies and colleagues who were open-minded and affirming, as well as having a sense of LGBTQ2S+ community in the workplace.

LGBTQ2S+-specific practices, programs, or policies

Participants discussed a wide range of practices, programs, or policies they perceived as supporting better employment experiences or outcomes. This included workplace policies and benefits designed explicitly with LGBTQ2S+ employees in mind, initiatives designed to foster gender inclusion and respect for gender diversity, and workplace education and training. In doing so, participants emphasized the importance of employer accountability in fostering better outcomes, and the need to shift responsibility for creating safe and inclusive environments away from LGBTQ2S+ employees themselves.

Progressive, flexible, and people-centred workplaces

Participants advocated for workplaces to embrace an inclusive and progressive work culture that would enhance the experiences of all employees, with distinct benefits for those who are LGBTQ2S+. Prioritizing employee well-being emerged as a key theme, especially policies and practices aimed at supporting positive mental health and increasing flexibility. Adequate and equitable wages – including through the use of transparent pay scales – and comprehensive benefit packages were considered key to meeting the unique needs of LGBTQ2S+ employees.

Non-workplace factors

Many participants described strong peer, family, and community support systems and networks in childhood and adulthood as having positive effects on employment experiences. Access to LGBTQ2S+ networks outside their workplace allowed participants to leverage connections with peers to obtain employment, and to gauge the safety of a job prior to applying. Legislative approaches were mentioned as necessary to ensure and enhance the rights and inclusion of LGBTQ2S+ employees, particularly the implementation and enforcement of policies around anti-discrimination, employment and pay equity, and stronger labour rights and standards.

IMPLICATIONS

Drawing on the voices of those participating in interviews and focus groups, this in-depth qualitative study sought to address a knowledge gap by focusing on the lived experiences of

currently and recently employed LGBTQ2S+ individuals. We hope this work adds valuable insights to the quantitative research being conducted in this area – including our own – by shedding light on the stories behind the statistics.

Despite legislative and socio-cultural advances in LGBTQ2S+ inclusion in Canada in recent years, our findings suggested that LGBTQ2S+ individuals continue to face employment inequities that are systemic and mutually reinforcing with those in other spheres. The employment experiences of those with whom we spoke were commonly characterized by prejudice, discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion. In addition to implications for mental health and well-being, participants articulated specific examples where these experiences inhibited their capacity to access, maintain, and advance in employment. At the same time, participants' accounts conveyed important differences across the LGBTQ2S+ community in Canada, pointing to the role of diverse social locations in shaping the experiences of gender and sexual minority individuals. Those whose experiences were additionally shaped by sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression described distinct and exacerbated disadvantage in employment.

Although our findings suggest that the employment journeys of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada continue to be characterized by prejudice and discrimination, participants' stories also displayed a great deal of resilience. Furthermore, several participants described jobs they found to be inclusive, positive, and affirming, and detailed some positive experiences that pointed to potential solutions. While this phase of the project offered participant-proposed solutions rather than formal recommendations, we hope they mobilize readers to action, with a view to developing policy and program interventions that are evidence-informed, inclusive, equitable, and effective for this population.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

In close collaboration with our partners, we engaged in knowledge translation planning from the outset of this project to ensure the resulting knowledge activities and products meet the needs of the relevant audiences and are action-oriented. To support this work, we established an ad-hoc knowledge translation committee which met over the course of the project to plan and discuss knowledge products, target audiences, and dissemination strategies.

Table 2 summarizes the knowledge translation activities associated with the project. Knowledge translation activities occurred both throughout and in the months following the three research phases of the project. We expect several knowledge translation activities to continue following the formal completion of the project.

Table 2 Knowledge translation activities

Phase	Product / Activity	Target audience	Dissemination strategies	Lead
Phase 1	Phase 1 report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Researchers ▪ Government data scientists & directors ▪ General public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SRDC website and newsletter ▪ ResearchGate and Google Scholar (PI) ▪ Social media: Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn (all partners) ▪ Link via partner websites 	SRDC
Phase 2	Phase 2 report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Researchers ▪ Government data scientists & directors ▪ Policy-makers ▪ General public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SRDC website and newsletter ▪ ResearchGate and Google Scholar (PI) ▪ Social media: Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn (all partners) ▪ Link via partner websites 	SRDC
Phase 2	Press release on core Phase 2 findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sent to 30 Canadian media contacts 	SRDC
Phase 2	Blog and linked labour market information (LMI) data on core Phase 2 findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economists ▪ Government data scientists and directors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LMIC online blog and linked LMI data available in English and French 	LMIC
Phase 3	Phase 3 report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ General public ▪ LGBTQ2S+ community members ▪ Researchers ▪ Policy-makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SRDC website and newsletter ▪ ResearchGate and Google Scholar (PI) ▪ Social media: Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn (all partners) ▪ Link via partner websites 	SRDC

Summary of evidence about economic, health, and social inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada

Phase	Product / Activity	Target audience	Dissemination strategies	Lead
Cross-project	Cultivating 2SLGBTQIA Belonging at Work (project insights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employers who are member of Pride at Work Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pride at Work Canada Member Workshop (May 11, 2022) Live virtual attendance Recording link available to members 	PaWC
Cross-project	Supporting 2SLGBTQIA Resurgence beyond Performative Allyship : Virtual Panel & Video	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business and community leaders General public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pride at Work Canada Public Panel (June 15, 2022) Video available on YouTube 	PaWC
Cross-project	Vancouver ProPride – Hybrid Panel (project insights)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2SLGBTQIA professionals and job seekers Employee Resource Group members DEI professionals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pride at Work Canada presented with Norton Rose Fulbright (July 28, 2022) In-person and virtual attendance Recording link available following event 	PaWC
Cross-project	Speaking engagements and presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Various fora 	PaWC
Cross-project	Infographic on wage gaps and employment experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economists Researchers Data scientists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LMIC website and/or social media Link via partner websites 	LMIC
Cross-project	“Pay gaps, precarity, and prejudice” – A visual executive summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SRDC website Social media: Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn (all partners) Link via partner websites 	SRDC
Cross-project	Final summary report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General public Researchers Policy-makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SRDC website and newsletter ResearchGate and Google Scholar (PI) Social media: Facebook Twitter, LinkedIn (all partners) Link via partner websites 	SRDC

PROJECT IMPLICATIONS

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES OF LGBTQ2S+ INDIVIDUALS IN CANADA

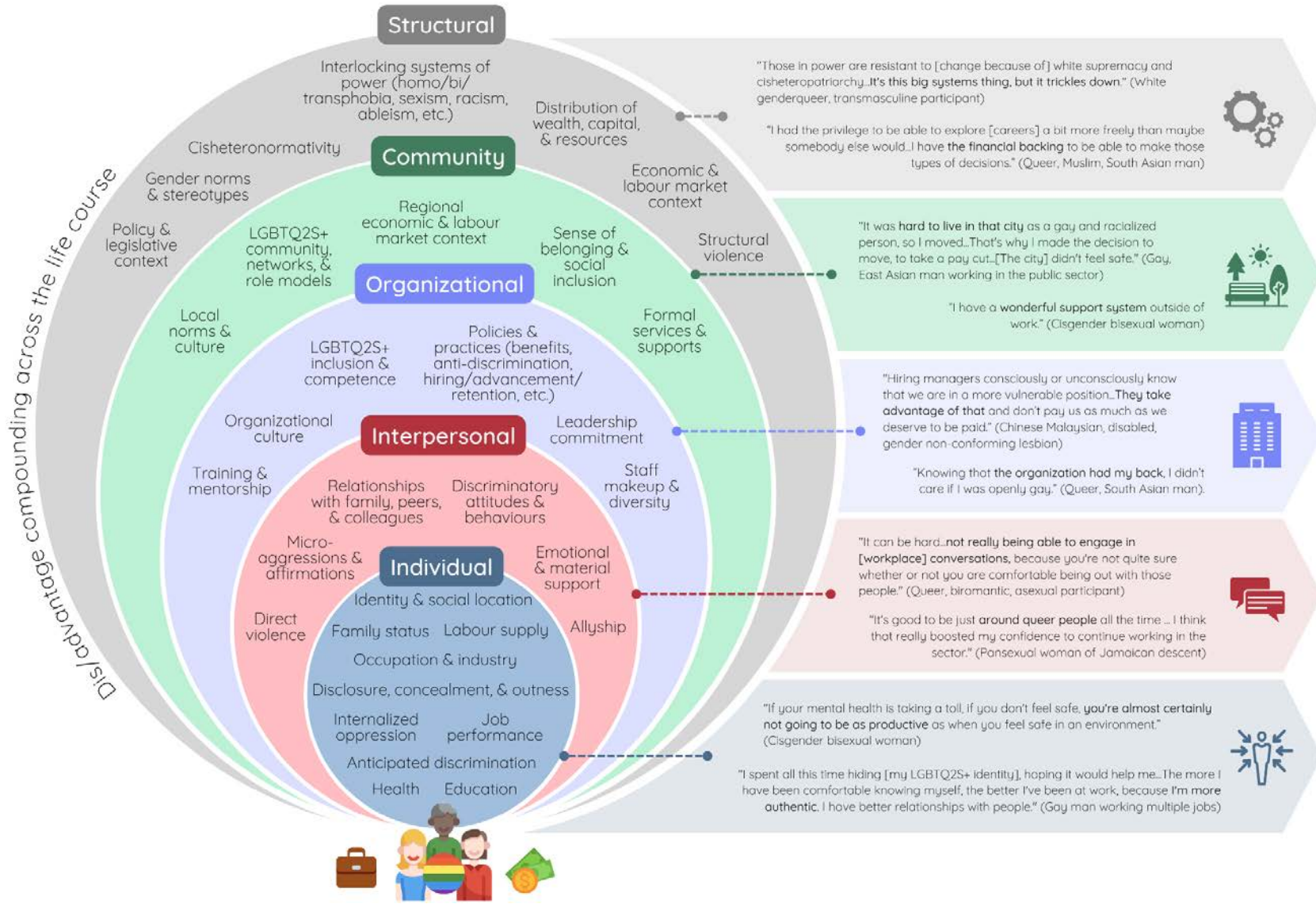
One of the central aims of this project was to develop a conceptual framework summarizing the key factors influencing employment and labour market outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ people in Canada. Initially developed during Phase 1 based on existing literature and interviews with key informants, our team has continued to build on this draft throughout the course of this project based on ongoing findings. The final version is presented on the following page.

The framework intentionally incorporates elements of the **socio-ecological systems and life course perspective** frameworks. The former highlights how factors occurring at lower levels of the framework are fundamentally shaped by those at higher levels. For instance, the experience of a trans person who refrains from negotiating a higher salary due to anticipated discrimination (individual level) may be influenced by gender norms and stereotypes, cisheteronormativity, and systems of power and domination (structural level). Our findings also suggest that these factors build over time and across the life course and other domains (e.g., health, social), further compounding related outcomes.

The framework seeks to capture factors that can shape employment and labour market outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ individuals **in both positive and negative ways**. In other words, the presence, absence, or nature of the factors presented may amplify or reduce inequities for LGBTQ2S+ people. Participant quotes on the right side of the framework, drawn from Phase 3 of the project, offer illustrative examples of how factors at each level influence positive or negative outcomes.

While several of the factors highlighted are likely to **influence employment and labour market outcomes regardless of one's gender or sexuality** (e.g., labour supply, regional labour markets), our findings suggested that they shape LGBTQ2S+ peoples' outcomes in distinct or disproportionate ways. Other factors are **population-specific**, meaning they exclusively or uniquely affect LGBTQ2S+ individuals (e.g., access to LGBTQ2S+ role models, specific workplace policies or practices). We acknowledge that both general and population-specific factors are likely to have **differing roles across the LGBTQ2S+ community**, depending on both gender and sexual identity as well as other social locations and identities (e.g., race, immigration status, age, class). While this framework seeks to synthesize the complexity of factors shaping employment outcomes, a deeper understanding of how these mechanisms operate within the LGBTQ2S+ community and across these identities is needed.

Figure 1 Factors influencing employment and labour market outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada: A framework



CONCLUSIONS

This multi-phase, mixed-methods research initiative aimed to build the evidence base about economic, health and social inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada. Over the course of over two years, our team worked in partnership with Pride at Work Canada, Dr. Sean Waite at Western University, and the Labour Market Information Council to map the Canadian landscape of data limitations as well as opportunities in this area, and to begin to address these through our own quantitative and qualitative research efforts.

The findings from this project suggest that LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada continue to face economic, health and social inequities that are systemic and mutually reinforcing. These include but are not limited to greater rates of poverty and homelessness, disparities in annual employment earnings, lower rates of life and job satisfaction, poorer general and mental health, increased stress, higher rates of food insecurity, and lower rates of community belonging. Gender minority and bisexual-identified individuals are among those consistently reporting the poorest outcomes. Our findings pointed to factors such as homo/bi/transphobic and other forms of prejudice and discrimination, repeated exposure to violence and microaggressions, and gaps in workplace policies and practices as some of the key drivers of the observed inequities. They also highlighted the rich diversity of the LGBTQ2S+ community, with various other systems of power and oppression (e.g., racism, ableism, ageism, etc.) creating unique forms of advantage and disadvantage for gender and sexual minority individuals, pointing to the importance of adopting an intersectional approach in both research and the development of potential interventions.

Our findings from conversations with LGBTQ2S+ employees in particular revealed the interconnected nature of people's experiences across health, education, housing, and employment systems, along with family and community influences, which combine to shape LGBTQ2S+ people's labour market outcomes over the life course. Based on our findings, we set out to develop a unified framework of differential labour market outcomes for LGBTQ2S+ people. This is only the start of an endeavour that we hope will serve as a springboard for others to continue to capture and nuance the complexity of factors at play, with a view to supporting effective and comprehensive interventions.

Our findings also pointed towards solutions in the realm of data, research, and policy to address those inequities; these included those identified by LGBTQ2S+ individuals themselves during Phase 3 of the project. Employers, coworkers, educators, and peers all have a major role to play in promoting safety, inclusion, and belonging in and outside of the workplace. While detailed insights from each phase of research are presented in their respective sections above, several overarching recommendations emerged from our findings that may be particularly relevant to

federal departments and actors, such as those involved in the implementation of the federal LGBTQ2 Action Plan. These include:

- **Pursue interventions that promote system-level changes** (e.g., strengthening anti-discrimination legislation and other labour market protections and standards);
- **Invest in multi-sectoral solutions** that support LGBTQ2S+ people to thrive across different life domains (e.g., education, housing, mental health);
- **Invest in labour market initiatives centered around fostering safe and inclusive workplace environments and policies**, including through support for civil society organizations that work to build organizational capacity for recruiting, hiring, and retaining LGBTQ2S+ employees;
- **Continue to implement more systematic and inclusive data collection in population-level surveys** (e.g., oversampling of LGBTQ2S+ and other marginalized communities, more expansive and inclusive response options for gender and sexual orientation, questions on experiences and outcomes of the LGBTQ2S+ community);
- **Continue to build the evidence** about economic, health and social outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ communities through **support for more research**, including through mixed-methods and intersectional approaches. Specifically, pursue more research on:
 - LGBTQ2S+-specific experiences (e.g., discriminatory hiring and advancement practices, decision-making/sorting in education and employment, biphobic microaggressions), and
 - Population subgroups that are understudied (e.g., gender minorities, bisexual-identified) and multiply-marginalized (e.g., racialized, disabled).

Further, our experience underscores the importance of supporting research that is culturally responsive and accessible.³³

While this project aimed to lay the foundation of knowledge about labour market outcomes of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada, we see it as the starting point for building comprehensive evidence required for meaningful action. We hope this project's findings, along with the identified gaps and opportunities with respect to research and data, serve to advance efforts to address economic, health and social inequities faced by LGBTQ2S+ individuals in Canada.

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