Resistances among proposal evaluators to policies promoting sex and gender analysis in research

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, a requirement that researchers should take into account the possible role of sex and/or gender differences in the content of their work has become an established component of national and supranational research policies, as well as policies of research funding and research performing organisations (Schiebinger et al. 2011-2025, Korsvik et al. 2023, White et al. 2021). In recent years, there has been a growing tendency to focus, too, on other social categories that may intersect with sex and gender, such as ethnicity, age or disability (e.g. European Commission 2020). Proponents of policies for integrating sex and gender analysis into research link this endeavour to an improved quality of research, its enhanced reproducibility, higher relevance of its outcomes for different groups and more equal distribution of its benefits (Schiebinger et al. 2011-2025). Despite the long-term efforts and continuous improvements (e.g. European Commission 2024), there are still many shortcomings in the effective implementation of the respective policies. Various studies from the EU countries and beyond document a lack of understanding of what integrating the gender analysis entails, as well as various misconceptions on the part of both researchers and evaluators of research proposals (e.g. Håkansson, Sand 2021; Haverfield, Tannenbaum 2021; van Hagen et al. 2021). This paper will build on these previous findings by focusing on the adoption of a policy promoting the integration of sex and gender analysis in the context of a selected Czech research funding organisation. It aims to provide an understanding of the process of policy adoption on the part of evaluators, based on a discursive analysis of their assessment reports (in one call for proposals focusing on different disciplines) and a qualitative content analysis of semi-structured interviews with staff working with evaluators. Attention will be paid primarily to the manifestations of implicit and explicit resistances (Sağlamer et al. 2016) to the requirement of sex and gender analysis (as an important factor contributing to the hindered implementation). The paper will also discuss the main discourses of resistances to which evaluators refer to. Its aim is to provide a reflection on the design of policies promoting the integration of sex and gender analysis in research funding organisations, the setting of the evaluation process, as well as effective communication strategies that can help address resistances to this specific type of intervention and thus contribute to the achievement of policy goals.

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