

PART III

GENDER AND RESEARCH

PUBLIC SECTOR RESEARCH WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Thus far, the study has focussed on the participation of women in SET. The study now turns to a consideration of the potential benefits of SET for women in South Africa. The original brief for this sub-project required that the researchers investigate, from a gender perspective, the extent to which public sector research addresses the two primary goals for the national system of innovation, as articulated in the National Research and Development (R&D) Strategy (2002:25); namely, improving quality of life and generating wealth creation.

In this section the study present the analysis of a subset of research projects in the public sector in South Africa, which sought to assess the extent to which these projects have a gender perspective – in other words, whether they focus on the specific needs, roles and perspectives of women and/or men in particular contexts. This involved coding projects as focussing on women-specific, men-specific or gender-specific issues. The study also attempted to establish what aspects of women's and men's lives these 'gender projects' addressed, via the development of 'research focus categories' within these identified projects. Finally, the study considers the nature and extent of gender projects with an SET focus.

The proportion of 'gender projects'

Less than one tenth of all the research projects were coded as having a gender focus: out of a total of 17 532 research projects in the five datasets, 1 115 (or 6.4%) were coded as 'gender projects'. The vast majority of these gender projects focused specifically on issues relating to women: 689 (or 62%) of the gender projects were coded as 'women-specific', 300 (or 27%) as 'men-specific', and 126 (or 11%) as 'gender-specific'.

The research focus categories

A total of nine research focus categories emerged from the coding of the projects. These are described in brief below.

Category 1: Gender and employment

Research projects in this category relate to gender or women and men in their working roles, in relation to education and training, occupational health and safety and general working conditions. The study distinguished between Category 1A and Category 1B. *Category 1A* includes research projects which focus on women, men or gender in the

workplace in general. The women-specific projects focused on women's characteristics, their working and training experiences and legal positions within a range of occupations, such as education and research, business, the military, taxi driving, construction and the ministry. Far fewer projects focused on men specifically. These considered men's perceptions and attitudes in the workplace, including use of violence, and their strength capabilities, in the medical and military professions. The gender-specific projects in this category focus more generally on gender attitudes, differences and equality in the workplace.

Category 1B, on the other hand, refers to projects which do not explicitly mention gender, women or men in their titles, but which focus on occupations that have a predominantly male or female workforce (see Statistics South Africa's Labour Force Survey 2002). The projects in this sub-category relate specifically to education and training, occupational health and safety and general working conditions of the workforce. The women-specific projects included those that focus on occupations in the community and service sectors, such as care-giving, domestic work, nursing, social work and occupational therapy. The men-specific projects included

those that focus on occupations that rely on the physical strength and endurance of a male workforce such as in mining, construction, engineering, seafaring and heavy vehicle transport.

Category 2: Gender and health Research projects in this category focus on health issues related to women and/or men. Again, some projects are explicit about their gender focus, while others have been included for focusing on unambiguously or predominantly women- or men-related health issues. Projects focusing on women's health range from common health issues like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, depression, sleep patterns and dietary habits of women, to particular female cancers, such as breast, cervical or ovarian cancer, and the reproductive health of women. Research projects that relate specifically to foetal and infant health, and mother and child health, are also included in this sub-category. Finally, the study has included in this category research projects that deal with abortion as a women's health issue⁸. Research projects related to men's health include projects which focus on dietary practices of men, men's physical fitness, heart surgery in men, men's reproductive health, including circumcision, and prostate cancer.

Category 3: Gender and sport Research projects in this category focus on women or men in sport in relation to injuries, selection and performance. The study have also included projects which do not explicitly mention gender in their titles, but which focus on predominantly male sports, like cricket and rugby, and predominantly female sports like netball.

Category 4: Gender and people at risk Research projects in this category focus on people at risk – defined here as women or men who are regarded as vulnerable or marginalised groups in terms of particular social, political and/or economic conditions. Women at risk include women as sex-workers, victims of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, older women, pregnant teenagers, migrant women and rural women. Men at risk include members of gangs, male sex-workers, migrant workers and male initiates.

⁸ Where abortion is dealt with as a women's rights issue, the research project has been included under Category 5: Gender, rights and status.

Category 5: Gender, rights and status Research projects in this category range from a focus on broad legislative issues to do with gender equality, employment equity and affirmative action that affect both women and men, to more specific concerns around women's rights and status with regard to abortion, civil society, education and religion, as well as a focus on the empowerment of rural women. One research project in this category focuses on men's custody rights.

Category 6: Gender in art, literature and the media Research projects in this category focus on women or men as writers, artists, performers, composers, historians or philosophers. Included in this category are projects that focus on literary themes of female or male characters in poetry and prose and on how women and men are represented in various media.

Category 7: Theorising gender Research projects in this category take gender as a social construct and provide theoretical arguments, and in some cases empirical evidence, towards understanding gender in different contexts and from different perspectives, for example, gender in relation to politics and power, citizenship, religion, education and colonialism. Research projects that theorise notions of feminism and lesbianism are included as women-specific projects, while those that theorise notions of masculinity and male homosexuality are included as men-specific projects in this category.

Category 8: Gender and life experiences Research projects in this category focus on various life experiences of women or men in different contexts. For example, research projects include women's experiences of the family, education, the church, spirituality, architecture and shopping as well as men's experiences of family responsibilities and traditions.

Category 9: Gender and population demographics This category includes all those research projects which set out to gather demographic information of specific populations. Although it is not always explicitly stated, the study assumes that demographic information includes gender information. Populations focused on in the research projects include hospital patients, rural

populations, provincial populations and squatter settlements.

Gender projects per category

The study now considers the distribution of the gender projects across the nine research focus categories (Table 1). Overall, around one third (34%) of all gender projects focused on gender and employment (Category 1), followed by a further one fifth (20%) on gender and health (Category 2). Significantly, very small proportions of these gender projects focused on people at risk (Category 4) or gender, rights and status (Category 5) – 5% and 8%, respectively.

Within the women-specific projects, a similar pattern emerges with the majority of these projects in Category 1 (34%) and Category 2 (26%). Almost half the men-specific projects

were also in Category 1 (46%), while a further third (33%) were focused on men in art, literature and the media (Category 6). Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority (48%) of gender-specific projects had to do with theorising gender as a social construct (Category 7).

Gender projects with an SET focus

Of the 1115 gender projects, 251 were identified as having an SET focus. The three SET focus areas identified included research into women's or men's participation in SET, research that would lead to technology development or innovation, and research that had the potential to lead to technology development or innovation. The research focus categories of Gender & Sport (68%) and Gender & Health (58%) had the largest proportion of gender projects with an SET focus.

table 1 | Distribution of gender projects across the research focus categories

Research focus categories		Women-specific		Men-specific		Gender-specific	
		N	% col	N	% col	N	% col
1	Employment	230	34%	137	46%	11	9%
2	Health	176	26%	31	10%	19	15%
3	Sport	7	1%	10	3%	2	2%
4	People at risk	51	7%	7	2%	0	0%
5	Rights and status	67	10%	1	0%	19	15%
6	Art, literature and media	76	11%	100	33%	4	3%
7	Theorising gender	19	3%	7	2%	60	48%
8	Life experiences	63	9%	7	2%	0	0%
9	Population demographics	0	0%	0	0%	11	9%
Total		689	100%	300	100%	126	100%

The results of this investigation suggest that very little research in the public sector in South Africa – less than one tenth – has a gender perspective. In addition, the majority of those projects that do focus on gender – either directly or indirectly – tend to focus specifically on women. Perhaps this is not surprising given

that gender research first emerged out of women studies programmes and has only recently begun to find a place across disciplines and professional fields.

The gender projects in the sample cover topics which echo many of the issues and concerns

relating to women and gender in the literature and in South Africa, from employment, health, sport, art, literature and the media, to people at risk, women's and men's rights and status, demography and life experiences. The findings show, however, that while issues such as women in the workplace or women's health receive considerable attention, there is a dearth of research that looks at other pressing issues, such as those relating to people at risk or their rights and status, from a gender perspective.

But what of the contribution of public sector research to improving the quality of life and economic prosperity of women as well as men? In order to answer this question, the researchers quantified the distribution of projects across the four research focus categories which they believe relate to these concerns expressed in the *National R&D Strategy* (Department of Science & Technology 2002:25), namely research projects that focus on employment, health, people at risk and rights and status (Categories 1, 2, 4 and 5). Together, these projects constitute 67% (or 749) of all the gender projects in the sample. Furthermore, if the study considers only the women-specific research projects within these categories, then 47% (or 524) of the gender research projects are geared specifically towards improving the quality of life of women and in some cases, generating wealth creation for women.

By way of concluding, the researchers present an extract from a paper presented by Sjamsiah Achmad at the UNESCO World Conference on Science (Budapest, June 1999), in which Achmad (2000:334) outlines the different ways in which the gender dimension of SET can be addressed:

"... The gender differential impact of SET should be addressed through a comprehensive approach emphasizing the ethical issues associated with both the conduct of scientific research and the application of its findings; the assessment of the extent to which SET aimed at benefiting disadvantaged people is really benefiting both men and women equally or the extent to which SET that is specifically aimed at empowering women does indeed benefit women rather than simply meeting their practical and immediate needs and in the long run perpetuating a disadvantaging stereotyped role of women; the introduction of new, more efficient and effective technology which sometimes displaces women from their source of income or opportunity for promotion and most of the time only meets women's practical needs and neglects their strategic gender needs; technology choices and design, which often fail to take into account women's real needs and concerns, due to the excessive priority given to efficiency of time and non-human energy."



REGIONAL AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES WHICH SEEK TO ENSURE THAT SET BENEFITS WOMEN IN GENERAL

Asia-Pacific Gender Equity in Science and Technology is a non-profit organisation that promotes the adoption of policies and programmes that ensure access to cutting edge science and technology by poor women in the Asia-Pacific region.

The **Science and Technology for Women Programme** of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India focuses on promoting the application of science and technology

to improve the life, working conditions and opportunities for gainful employment of women, especially in rural areas. The same Department has established **technology parks for women** which are designed to give ordinary women in India access to and training in various appropriate technologies.

The **Women of Uganda Network** aims to develop the use of information and communication technologies among women as tools to share information and address issues collectively.
