

Guest editorial

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Intersectionality in addressing gender-based violence (GBV): global perspective

Intersectionality theory first introduced by Crenshaw (1989) is concerned with discrimination in circumstances where gender, class, age, race, religion, sexuality and other forms of identities and circumstances intersect at the same time where one ontological level does not take priority over the other. Yuval-Davis (2005, p. 202) argues that it is equally important to separate “the different analytical levels in which social divisions need to be examined [...] the ways different social divisions are constructed by, and intermeshed in, each other in specific historical conditions”. The intersectionality framework is useful in understanding the different dimensions of power, privilege, discrimination and inequalities that are historical, spatially and structurally stratified, and systematically contribute to social injustice. In this special issue, social patterns of oppression are shown to be both interrelated and brought together, and occurs through race, gender, marital status, location, nationality and class.

Across the world women face different levels and forms of GBV. The root causes of GBV are gender inequalities and lower status of women; the economic, social and other intersectional factors exacerbate violence. GBV is one of the major threats to girls and women’s full participation in political, economic and social spheres and the articles in this special issue provide a timely assessment of its intersectional causes and consequences.

The first paper entitled “The effect of the 2014 West Africa Ebola virus disease epidemic on multi-level violence against women” by Melanie O’Brien and Maria Ximena Tolosa (2016) provides a review of literature to highlight the impact of the Ebola virus epidemic on women’s health by examining violations of their human rights that occurred as a direct and indirect consequence of the epidemic with a focus on structural violence against women and barriers to receive appropriate sexual and reproductive health care. By putting intersectionality at the heart of its argument the paper brings out critical elements that contribute to and cause GBV (race, economics/wealth, class, religion, development, security and gender) in West African countries.

The second paper “Intersectionality and adolescent domestic violence and abuse: addressing classed sexism’ and improving service provision” by Rhona Bridget O’Brien (2016) explores the intersections of age, race, location, class and gender as experienced by adolescent service users living within an economically deprived neighbourhood in the North West of England. The paper skillfully makes thematic links to policy and programmes and provides background on intersectionality by making race and class as central themes.

The third in the issue entitled “Making practice inclusive in gender based violence work” by Suzane Patricia Martin (2016) is a viewpoint that presents a case for reflective practice with an intersectional focus in supporting practitioners working with GBV with its links to social exclusion. The author carefully identifies intersectionality, power and empathy as central themes in improving practitioner responses to GBV. How these themes apply to interactions between practitioners and abused women is demonstrated through examples from reflective practice sessions by drawing on UK-based evidence.

The fourth article “Mental health predicted by coping, social support, and resilience among young unwed pregnant Malaysian women and mothers living in shelter homes” by Jana *et al.* (2016) makes marital status, honour, culture, motherhood and gender as key intersectional factors that contribute to emotional violence. The author’s indirect reference to intersectionality highlights some of the key factors contributing to gender inequalities faced by Malaysian women.

The fifth and the final paper “Honour based violence as a global public health problem: a critical review of literature” by Bhanbhro *et al.* (2016) introduces honour-based violence as a form of violence by drawing examples from several sources. The paper enmeshes itself in race and identity politics. While culture and religion are the causes of GBV, the author suggests politicising race and identity. The paper engages itself in nuanced debates of representation of minority women that intersectionality is concerned with.

Together these papers contribute to feminist knowledge of “difference” and “representation” in order to legitimatise the voices of women from different and minority backgrounds deeply embedded in identity politics. Evidently, they have demonstrated the use of intersectionality at different analytical levels to understand female lived experiences. They have engaged themselves with sociologically and culturally constructed ideas of discrimination on a multiplicity of different levels. They produce a wide range of responses influenced by the intersectional system of society.

This special issue on a highly contentious human rights topic has been brought together by the support and encouragement of many people but particularly the Series Editor, Dr Theo Gavrielides. We thank him for supporting the idea and giving the much needed space to debate evidence around intersectionality and GBV.

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