

Towards More Inclusive Strategies to Address Gender-Based Violence

Sexual and gender-based violence is persistent and devastating, rooted deeply in the lives of men, women, boys and girls globally. Gendered violence does not exist in isolation, and is intertwined with other forms of power, privilege and social exclusion. Processes of marginalisation, unhelpful binary views and institutional discrimination only serve to create, embed, and exacerbate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Understanding and sharing lessons around the complex social differences that surround SGBV is vital if change is going to happen, and this is particularly with reference to collective action and the role of men and boys. Taking an ‘intersectional analysis’ approach can help to realise the tangled nature of SGBV and how cross-movement alliance building and the sharing of best practice is crucial in tackling this violence.

Why intersectionality?

The concept of intersectionality has grown out of feminist theory and practice and establishes that interconnected power systems and patriarchal structures of supremacy and subordination oppress and discriminate in multiple ways (across different axes of social differentiation and stratification). People therefore experience discrimination and oppression differently according to the multiple identities that make up who they are, meaning that both privilege and discrimination are reinforced. As a result, the feeling of power and powerlessness can manifest in different ways and people may often experience both privilege and discrimination at the same time, but on different grounds.

Intersectionality therefore provides a theoretical tool for moving analysis beyond simplistic conceptions of identity to make the complexities of difference and oppression visible. The implication for work to address SGBV is that gendered violence does not occur in isolation but is intertwined with other forms of oppression also based on social differences such as race, age, sexuality, class, (dis)ability and/or geographic

location, which are deeply ingrained in societal structures and norms.

Case study research on addressing SGBV in Egypt, India, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Uganda, presented in this brief, demonstrates how intersectional analysis has supported gender-justice movements to: politicise action to address sexual and gender-based violence; transform the issue from a private to a public concern; and to make a shift towards addressing the root causes of the issue. It also highlights that gender and other social justice issues must be understood within specific cultural and historical contexts and as having multiple dimensions – social, economic and political.

Exposing sources of marginalisation and institutional discrimination

Work to address SGBV should start by identifying and engaging with overlapping sources of discrimination and oppression like racism, gender discrimination, homophobia, transphobia and ageism. This enables contextualised reading of the factors that fuel sexual and gendered violence. For example, in India the impact of caste and class on

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women's internalised feelings of subordination compounds the impact of the violence women experience in private and public life. In Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda and Egypt, case studies found that survivors of violence are often stigmatised. In these contexts SGBV intersects with social norms that reinforce the survivor as somehow to blame. This marginalisation blocks access to support networks, services and legal action for survivors of violence.

An intersectional perspective can also help to surface the complexity of sexualised and gendered violence in public space. In South Africa and Egypt, gender norms and behaviours were subject to social 'policing' by friends, families and local social and political actors. Violence was used as a way to punish those who do not conform to accepted gender identities. In Egypt, women activists occupying public space were perceived by some as stepping out of their positions of subservience within the home and deserving of sexual harassment. In South Africa, black lesbian women have experienced physical and verbal assault as a means of policing expressions of sexuality perceived as wrong by people in their community.

The case studies reveal how discriminations play out in the political positions of different groups, and an intersectional lens highlights the role of public institutions, like the police and health-care workers, in perpetuating and challenging multiple discriminations. In Uganda men who are refugees and survivors of sexual violence have faced prejudice and stigma as the issue of male-rape is ridiculed and/or misconceived as homosexuality by medical professionals working in a patriarchal and homophobic context. People living as refugees in South Africa have also faced barriers in going to the police to address issues of gendered violence, as it is perceived that they will be refused support services because they are not considered citizens. Markers of citizenship such as legal identity reflect a form of privilege and relative power that affects how gender-based violence is addressed.

In Kenya and South Africa sexual minorities and sex workers have faced institutional discrimination; with survivors being met with hostility and humiliation from police officers. This discrimination has an implication for the way that gender equality laws and policies become implemented, including in South

Africa where progressive laws have been documented, such as the definition of rape as being gender-neutral. One of the key findings across all studies is the disjuncture between rights upheld by international and national agreements, laws and policies and the way these frameworks are implemented in practice. The role of service providers is crucial here, as they mediate how access to and accountability of services play out in people's everyday lives.

Highlighting masculinities and helping to break down gender binaries

An intersectional lens helps to make visible that there are hierarchies of masculinities embedded within patriarchal gender orders and structural inequalities that drive SGBV. Expressions of masculinities include the idealisation of certain values of control and power, along with the expectation of confirming them. In South Africa and Kenya, legacies of racial and economic inequality, the absence of effective social protection and dramatic levels of unemployment have fuelled public and intimate violence. This violence coincides with harmful expressions of masculinity and the reclaiming of traditional breadwinner roles for men.

The case studies show that within this system different kinds of men can exert violence over other – more marginalised and subordinate – men. For example, the often violent control or punishment of lower caste men by upper caste men and women. Through an intersectional analysis simplistic narratives of victim or perpetrator and masculinity versus femininity can be broken down opening up a more nuanced and effective space for intervention to address SGBV.

In Sierra Leone and Uganda, the nature of violence in conflict-affected contexts and the realities of refugees provide a critique of a narrow understanding of 'victim/perpetrator', in which men are cast as perpetrators and women as victims. Both studies highlight the limitations of policy and legal discourse that uphold this binary. Namely, that male survivors are made invisible excluding a vulnerable group from services and recognition; that victimhood becomes simplified as feminine and lacking agency. This stance compromises responses with female as well as male victims and does not recognise that victims of violence can also be survivors, and activists or agents of change.

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Understanding intersecting inequalities for collective political action on SGBV

The case studies show that avenues for addressing SGBV working with both men and women and linking gender to other issues of social injustice can dismantle exclusion and inequalities and build a basis for collective political action on SGBV.

Experiences from India, South Africa, Kenya and Uganda highlight how working with men to analyse the intersecting inequalities and vulnerabilities experienced by different men and boys (e.g. social class, ethnicity or sexuality) can help them build a personal and political connection to how and why SGBV can be prevented and addressed. In Kenya and India it was argued that this process must involve challenging the investments in patriarchal privilege that men and boys hold alongside highlighting the harm that oppressive masculine norms imply for different men, women, boys, girls and people of nonconforming gender identity. In Egypt, men were encouraged to think about and engage with SGBV by using notions of humanity and fairness, building a new and shared narrative to address the issue based on societal concern, as opposed to a women's issue.

In Kenya it was highlighted that more research is needed to identify best practice approaches for engaging more marginalised groups of men in collective action to address gendered violence, for example young HIV-positive men who face SGBV. In India, further development of practical methods for intersectional analysis was flagged as a need to support new work with transgender persons, groups marginalised by caste inequality, with children and for older people. The India study highlighted that SGBV interventions need to be more inclusive in that they often focus on women and men of productive age within a heterosexual family unit. The challenge faced here is both, how you work with vulnerable men to address the issues in their lives, whilst maintaining a focus on gender justice and ending SGBV.

Building solidarity in collective action

The activist groups identified in these studies are all working with a range of stakeholders to collectively demand social change and ensure that, where enabling laws exist,

human rights are enacted and resources are made available to all people to claim their rights irrespective of their race, class, gender, sexuality and citizenship.

Collective action can create space to analyse and address the links between gender and violence in relation to multiple power asymmetries and build solidarities to take action. In India, the solidarity-based approach of the Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women campaign (MASVAW) aims to support a personal connection to political action for gender equality by analysing how patriarchal inequalities cut across caste and social class in activists' own lives describing the relevant social injustices in parallel thus creating a platform for action. Findings from Sierra Leone, Egypt, India, South Africa and Uganda highlight the need for strong and effective collective action at the local level; both in terms of understanding SGBV issues and also in building contextually relevant recommendations for action.

Cross-movement alliances to address the intersections of inequalities that fuel SGBV can build collective power for demanding social change. SGBV was seen as a central issue around which different networks and movements can come together. In South Africa organisational partnerships between CSOs working on gender justice and sexual minority rights provided space for activists to learn from each other on different forms of gendered discrimination and embed that learning in their work. They also highlighted the importance of this for accountability on inclusion and transformation within movements.

There are challenges to building cross-movement or inter-sectoral alliances including underlying rivalries, scarcity of resources and limited spaces to build trust and understanding between movements. In Kenya, it was felt that there is insufficient collaboration between organisations within the SGBV field and calls were made for more innovative thinking in gender justice movements, including linking with groups working with sexual minorities. This points to the importance of breaking down the binaries on which many SGBV interventions and policies are established; namely, they address it as violence against women, and within intimate heterosexual relationships.

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Policy recommendations

- Policy narratives and tools to address gendered violence must conceptualise gender as social relations – not just sex – and recognise that gendered power differences intersect with inequalities and privileges in relation to race, ethnicity, class, (dis)ability, sexuality, age and citizenship status, allowing for deeper context analysis.
- Intersectional analysis for addressing SGBV needs to start from the experiences of those who are most marginalised and living with violence and solutions must be driven from the bottom up in order to fully account for everyone in a contextually relevant way.
- The design of interventions to address SGBV can be strengthened through a better understanding of how intersectional exclusions and privileges manifest as diverse expressions of SGBV for men, women, girls, boys and people with marginalised gender identities.
- Collective action through larger cross-movement alliances should be at the core of programme design and implementation. These alliances provide a platform to unpick the complex issues around structural inequalities and gender discrimination and can hold those in power accountable for addressing SGBV.
- Policies and programming interventions need to challenge the discrimination that marginalised groups face within the political and judicial institutions tasked to address SGBV. Training and awareness raising to challenge discrimination by service providers is crucial here as they mediate access to and accountability of services, and uphold social norms.
- Practical methods for intersectional analysis need to be developed in order to support work with men and women as agents of change to address SGBV and in exploring the personal connection to political action. Best practice approaches need to be identified so that people living with privilege and marginality can be engaged more effectively in collective action.
- Forums and spaces to enable exchange of experience across initiatives engaging men in sexual and gender-based violence within countries, and also across regions and continents should be created to enable more inclusive conversations and alliances to address SGBV at all levels.



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Further reading

Crenshaw, K.W. (1995) 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color' in Crenshaw et al. (eds.), *Critical Race Theory*, New York: New Press

Morrell, R. (1998) 'Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24: 605–30

Cabrera, P.M. (2010) *Intersecting Violences: A Review of Feminist Theories and Debates on Violence against Women and Poverty in Latin America*, London: Central America Women's Network (CAWN)

Programmatic case study reports from South Africa, India, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Egypt and Uganda on which this Policy Briefing is based can be read here: <http://interactions.eldis.org/gender-based-violence>. South Africa and Uganda case study pages include visual outputs from the case studies that outline personal and shared narratives by activists.

Credits

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