

Resisting Gender Violence

RESISTING GENDER VIOLENCE

COLLECTED WORKS

Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR



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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Violence rooted in gender and its intersections with race, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, and age is a global problem. It manifests in everything from date rape and violence in the family to queer-bashing and rape as a tool of war. The majority of the world's girls and women and LGBTQIA+ people experience some form of gender violence, whether verbal, physical, or sexual. The consequences of this pandemic of gender violence are profound for individuals, communities, and societies.

Feminists are committed to reducing and someday ending gender violence. Feminist activism against gender violence uses street art, protest, education, policy, and legislation to try to address the root causes as well as impacts of gender violence.

This textbook explores what gender violence is, why it happens, what results, and how we can combat it. Because gender violence is a global problem, this textbook takes a global approach. Its editors and authors come from all over the world and bring perspectives that challenge any single approach to understanding or addressing the problem.

Our goal for this textbook is to encourage you to deepen your understanding of gender violence and discover ways you can resist and be engaged in movements to end gender violence.

As feminists, we are committed to generating and sharing knowledge that empowers readers to make a difference in the world around them. That's why we chose to create an open access resource for students. The book offers readable text with learning activities, sidebars, questions for reflection, and additional resources for you to explore on your own. We hope it helps you learn and grow and find your place in the struggle for global gender justice.

We want to thank the incredible authors who contributed their time and effort in writing interesting, informative, and challenging chapters—Patti Duncan, Rebecca Lambert, Janet Lockhart, Razan Ghazzawi, Maria Franco-Garcia, Laura Pallarés Ameneiro, Xosé M. Santos, Asha Shukla, Jaya Phookan, Pavitra, Virginija Juréniené, Mehra Shirazi, Kamalaveni Veni, Meena Gopal, Whitney Archer, Elizabeth Kennedy, Jayamala Mayilsamy, Shannon Garvin, and Giovanna Vingelli.

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Finally, we thank our colleagues and students who have helped shape our thinking about gender violence and the ways we teach to help bring about a more inclusive, equitable, just, and nonviolent world.

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RESISTING GENDER VIOLENCE

An Introduction

Patti Duncan

Abstract

This chapter introduces the concept of gender violence, and the topics and themes of this textbook. Gender violence, which includes domestic violence, sexual violence, and multiple forms of state (governmental) violence, is prevalent and frequently normalized in our society, and survivors of gender violence are often stigmatized. In addition, we examine what it means to consider gender violence through an intersectional, transnational feminist framework. Intersectionality helps us recognize systems of oppression as overlapping and mutually reinforcing. Transnational feminism moves beyond white, western, imperial feminist approaches, to challenge the idea of a binary Global North and South, and to emphasize solidarity across borders. Resisting gender violence is crucial, but we must also be critical of punitive feminist responses, which often rely on criminalization and incarceration. Instead, the author argues, resisting gender violence requires a multi-pronged strategy that focuses on *structural* forms of violence, and that follows the lead of survivors of gender violence.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will identify and describe types of gender violence
- Students will situate gender violence within an intersectional, transnational feminist framework
- Students will describe strategies that are useful in addressing gender violence

What Is Gender Violence?

Gender violence occurs within every country, continent, and cultural context, affecting women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people of all racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, ability, and age groups, including all sexualities. Gender violence is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world.

Many scholars, activists, and organizations, including the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO), use the terms “gendered violence,” “gender-based violence,” “violence against women,” and “sexual and gender-based violence,” to describe forms of violence against women and other minoritized groups, such as nonbinary, transgender, and Two-Spirit people. These terms are frequently used interchangeably; however, some scholars and activists believe that “violence against women” is an important term because the majority of victims of intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence are women and girls. While gender violence may target people of all genders, worldwide these forms of violence are most likely to target women and girls, including trans women, as well as individuals who may challenge or transgress local gender norms within their societies. The 1993 United Nations’ *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* (DEVAW), defined *violence against women* as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (UN General Assembly, 1993).

The editors of this textbook have chosen to use the term *gender violence* as an umbrella term for all the forms of violence that target individuals and communities based on gender. Gender violence includes *domestic violence*, sometimes referred to as domestic abuse, family violence, or intimate partner violence, which can include physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and/or economic forms of abuse within an intimate partner relationship, and is defined as a pattern of behavior in a relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over a partner. Domestic violence can occur within a range of relationships, including married couples, family members, people who are dating, heterosexual, and same-sex relationships.

Gender violence includes *sexual violence*, defined as sexual activity in which consent is not obtained or freely given, and which includes sexual assault, rape, and sexual abuse. *Sexual harassment* is a form of sexual violence in which one receives unwanted and unwelcome verbal, nonverbal, or physical sexual conduct, and can occur in the workplace, school settings, homes, and public places.

Gender violence also includes forced prostitution, trafficking, stalking (including cyberstalking), “honor” killings, and state violence and hate crimes directed at particular groups of women or gender minorities, including Black, Indigenous, and other women of color, women of particular ethnic, religious, or cultural groups, disabled women and girls, women in the sex industry, and queer, trans, and gender nonconforming people. Women and girls most vulnerable to violence include members of ethnic minority groups; Indigenous, displaced, and refugee women and girls; migrant women, including migrant women workers; women in detention; women and girls with disabilities; women and girls in the sex industry; those living in poverty and/or on the street; and those in situations of armed conflict. Gender violence includes violence perpetrated by governments (also called “states,” or nations, in this context), including violence associated with reproductive health, detention, and the criminal justice system. Gender violence

(by military combatants and by civilians) takes place in contexts of armed conflict and war, where rape has been documented as a tool of war, and *femicide*—the systematic killing of women and girls—as a form of genocide.

The 1993 passage of DEVAW by the United Nations General Assembly is significant as it represents an explicit international recognition of gender violence as a human rights issue requiring state intervention, rather than a private issue to be resolved within families. The first special rapporteur on violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, was appointed in 1994, and conducted a detailed investigation about the causes and consequences of gender violence at national, regional, and international levels. In her report, Coomaraswamy focused on three key areas where gender violence occurs—families, communities, and states. Within families, practices including domestic violence, sexual abuse, marital rape, infanticide, and dowry-related violence make women and girls particularly vulnerable. Within the general community, women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals experience sexual harassment, sexual assault, labor exploitation, and trafficking. And state violence includes forms of violence perpetrated or condoned by governments or their institutions, such as criminal justice systems, immigration enforcement, and the medical-industrial complex (Coomaraswamy, 1996).

The costs and consequences of gender violence are profound, and include economic and social costs stemming from isolation and the inability to work, participate in regular activities, or care for children (WHO, 2024); as well as stigma and rejection from partners, families, and communities (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; WHO, 2024). Gender violence is a major cause of death and disability, and forms of violence may lead to a range of health problems, including physical issues and disorders, reproductive health problems (including HIV infection, unintended pregnancy, injury, and trauma to the reproductive tract), as well as emotional distress, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and suicide. “Violence or the threat of violence creates barriers to women’s and girls’ full participation in society, and represents a serious obstacle to women’s empowerment, gender equality, reproductive justice, and human rights” (Duncan, 2022).

What does it mean to resist gender violence? And what are the barriers to doing so? In this volume, authors from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds, institutional contexts, and social locations consider these questions, offering various strategies to help us develop a collective analysis. This introduction explains several key terms, and presents an *intersectional* and *transnational* feminist conceptual framework for us to understand gender violence. As the editors explain in their preface, the chapters in this textbook focus on victims and survivors of gender violence, prioritizing their voices in naming problems and proposing solutions.

Resisting gender violence is challenging because it is so commonplace in our society. Many forms of gender violence are accepted and viewed as normal, natural, harmless, or even deserved, particularly when the targets of such violence are members of vulnerable or marginalized communities. According to the World Health Organization, at least one in three women worldwide is subjected to gender violence at some point in their lifetime (WHO, 2024). Survivors of gender violence are stigmatized in many societies; they may feel shame or humiliation, or they may be reluctant to report the violence for fear of not being believed or due to risks of additional violence, including violence perpetrated by law enforcement officials. In cases of intimate partner violence and domestic violence, many people view gender violence as a private matter to be resolved within the family. In actuality, gender violence is a structural problem, perpetuated and/or sustained by social institutions worldwide.

After reading this introduction you will have a better understanding of what gender violence is, and how to understand gender violence through intersectional and transnational feminist lenses. Chapters in this textbook will cover a variety of themes related to gender violence, including climate change, labor, health, sports, and media.

Learning Activity: Gender Norms, Gender Roles, and Gender Violence

Objective: Students will examine the connection between gender norms, gender roles, and the perpetuation of gender violence in society. This activity will encourage you to reflect on the social and cultural forces that bolster gendered expectations and how they contribute to various forms of gender violence.

1. Identify gender norms and roles, creating two lists:
 - Gender Norms: List at least five gender norms you associate with women/girls and men/boys. (Example: women are nurturing, men are tough)
 - Gender Roles: List at least five gender roles you associate with women/girls and men/boys. (Example: women are caregivers, men are protectors)
2. Analyze how gender norms and roles are promoted by writing a few sentences about how each gender norm and gender role is promoted or reinforced in society. Use the following societal and cultural institutions:
 - Media (television, advertising, film, social media)
 - Patriarchy (a social structure that reinforces male dominance/toxic masculinity)
 - Religion (how gender roles and norms are connected to religious practices)
 - Culture (customs, traditions, societal expectations for gender expression)
 - Education (curriculum, teacher-student interactions, sports)
 - Family (parental expectations, familial roles)
3. Connect gender norms and roles to gender violence by identifying at least five forms of gender violence that are increased by the gender norms and roles you have identified. Consider the following types of gender violence:
 - Physical violence (intimate partner violence, sexual assault)
 - Psychological violence (emotional abuse, gaslighting, sexism)
 - Economic violence (human trafficking, wage gaps)
 - Social violence (marginalization, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, toxic masculinity)

- Structural violence (legal discrimination, racism, ableism)
4. For each of the above forms of gender violence, explain how they are linked to the gender roles and norms you identified in step 1. For example:
 - Norm: “Women are nurturing.” Social Violence: Women are pressured to become mothers and to perform outsized household labor. This can reinforce sexist ideologies about women’s roles outside and inside of the home. It can also delegitimize the experiences of women who choose not to have children or be homemakers.
 - Role: “Men are protectors.” Social Violence and Physical Violence: Men are pressured to fulfill the role of a protector in society. This can encourage physical and emotional aggression in the name of personal and familial/relational protection. It can also reinforce toxic masculinity and normalize emotional suppression in men and boys.
 5. Share your findings with a classmate and consider how your identities, cultural backgrounds, and geographic locations impact your understanding of gender roles and norms.

An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Gender Violence

The writings in this textbook rely on an intersectional feminist approach. *Intersectionality* is an influential concept grounded in Black feminist thought, theorized by Black feminist scholars and writers including Anna Julia Cooper, Frances Beal, the Combahee River Collective, Patricia Hill Collins, and others. Today, many attribute intersectionality to Black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term in two foundational articles, “Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex” (1989) and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1991). Intersectionality highlights the ways that structures of power intersect (overlap or interact) with one another. As Patricia Hill Collins explains, “intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice” (2000, p. 21). Thus, an intersectional feminist analysis helps us understand how race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, caste, age, disability, and other systems of domination intersect, creating multiple forms of violence that target specific communities and individuals. Crenshaw uses the term to underscore the ways Black women and other women of color experience both sexism and racism, frequently leading to being targeted for specific forms of violence.

As an analytical tool, intersectionality allows us to understand how a person’s experiences of gender violence are shaped by other categories of their identities and other systems of oppression. It lets us make connections among multiple forms of gender violence, from police brutality to medical and reproductive forms of gender violence. Intersectionality, as Jennifer C. Nash writes, is an “analytic that asks how we might reconceptualize discrimination, harm, violence, and power around the experiences of the multiply rather than the singly marginalized” (2021, p. 129). And as Vivian M. May suggests, intersectionality “approaches lived identities as interlaced and systems of oppression as

enmeshed and mutually reinforcing” and focuses on their “interstices, from the nodal points where they hinge or touch” (2015, p. 3).

Tragically, a recent incident helps us understand why we need an intersectional feminist analysis of gender violence. Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black woman and emergency medical technician, was killed in her Kentucky home in the United States in March 2020 by the police, who forced entry into her home in the middle of the night because they were looking for her ex-boyfriend. The police shot Taylor multiple times and left her without medical care for more than 20 minutes. No one was charged for Taylor’s death (one former police officer was recently found guilty of one count of civil rights abuse) (US Department of Justice, 2024). Breonna Taylor’s death highlights systemic racism and racialized gender violence in the context of a long history of police brutality and violence against Black communities.

Countless Black women have been killed by police or died in police custody, including Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, and too many others; but as Crenshaw notes, the recurring police violence against Black women rarely gets the attention it deserves. In response, she created the hashtag #SayHerName as a form of public activism and collective social media response, asking us all to remember the lives of Black women and girls who have been killed by the police (Crenshaw et al., 2015). An intersectional feminist analysis of Taylor’s murder shows it as a form of gendered racism and racialized gender violence.



#SayHerName remembers Black women killed by police and/or state violence

Intersectional feminism reminds us that gender violence does not occur only because of gender discrimination. State violence, which includes physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, may take multiple forms; and as noted earlier, targets the most vulnerable populations. It may include violence perpetrated by police and the criminal justice system, including immigration officials, violence against women and girls in detention, and violence associated with medical care and reproductive health.

Because victims of gender violence frequently experience multiple forms of violence—associated with poverty, racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, colonization, and militarization, among other systems—it is critical to approach gender violence through an *intersectional* feminist framework. For example, Indigenous women are often subjected to violence, including sexual violence, used as a tool of conquest and genocide. The numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people in the settler colonial context of North America have reached epidemic proportions. This violence represents a form of colonial violence, linked to historical trauma for Indigenous communities. Similar rates of violence are also reported among other Indigenous communities, including Australia and New Zealand. In situations of armed conflict, the political motives underlying war are also often used to justify sexual violence against women and girls; as we have seen in Rwanda, Vietnam, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Korea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, and Ukraine. While the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women asserts that states should condemn violence against women, such violence nonetheless continues.

Gender Violence in Gaza

In Gaza, since October 2023, violence against Palestinians has escalated sharply. Israeli air strikes have demolished Palestinian hospitals and schools, every university in Gaza has been destroyed, Israeli authorities have cut off essential services such as water and electricity, and more than 46,000 people have been killed. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (UN Office of the High Commissioner, 2024), gender violence has increased dramatically. Palestinian women and girls have been targeted, detained, and executed along with family members, including their children. Women and girls have been subjected to abuse, rape, and sexual violence. Many Palestinian women and children have been reported missing after contact with the Israeli army. News reports estimate that nearly one million Palestinian women and girls have been displaced, increasing their vulnerability to gender violence and reproductive injustice.

The Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC) argues that what is happening in Gaza constitutes reproductive genocide, which refers to “the policies, discourses, and practices that delimit, restrict, target, or diminish the life-giving capacities, choices, access, short-term health, long-term health, and life chances of communities made vulnerable by systemic military violence and occupation, besiegement, settler colonialism, and/or imperial warfare,” and which includes “mass incarceration; psychological warfare; collective punishment; ethnic cleansings; gendered and sexual violence of women and girls by an occupying state or force; gendered and sexual violence of men and boys by an occupying state or force; and forced conditions of unlivability” (Palestinian Feminist Collective, 2024).

A Transnational Feminist Framework for Understanding Gender Violence

This textbook also emphasizes a *transnational* feminist framework for understanding gender violence. Unlike “global feminism,” which implies a “universal sisterhood,” and “international feminism,” which regards national borders as concrete realities, transnational feminist approaches “emphasize the political function of borders while they expose their constructedness and porousness” (Savci, 2021, p. 241). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan’s influential book, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (1994) offered an important critique of the presumed universality of womanhood within dominant western feminist constructions, which failed to account for the differing experiences of women in various contexts around the world. Other feminist scholars, including Chandra Talpade Mohanty, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Uma Narayan, built on and extended this treatment to theorize transnational feminisms in relation to global capitalism, neoliberalism, reproductive labor, tourism, care work, the global sex industry, and militarism and war.

Ashwini Tambe and Millie Thayer write: “Transnational feminism is at once a perspective, a set of theories, *and* a set of activist practices, networks, and discourses” (2021, p. 15). As they explain, transnational feminism is aligned with intersectional feminism, as it examines the ways systems of oppression interact with one another. In addition, originating as a critique of imperial feminism, transnational feminism focuses on “the relationship among colonialism, racial formations, and gender/sexual regimes” (Tambe & Thayer, 2021, p. 17). Hence, a transnational feminist approach to gender violence also considers the dynamics and politics of settler colonialism, migration, globalization, neoliberalism, capitalism, and political economy.

A transnational feminist theoretical framework recognizes more fluid boundaries and borders between nation-states and global processes that may be multi-directional. It also questions the binary concept of Global North and South (or “First World/Third World”). And it emphasizes the interconnectedness of our experiences, histories, and struggles across national borders, enabling us greater forms of solidarity.

In considering gender violence through a transnational feminist framework, we must be critical of the ways western paradigms have shaped discourse on violence against women worldwide. In particular, dominant narratives of gender violence in the Global South often rely on harmful stereotypes about local women and communities. Cultural relativism—or the idea that individuals should be understood in the context of their society—is often used to reinforce the assumption that violence against women in some contexts can be explained by their “culture.” Scholars like Uma Narayan have asked why this is so often the rationale for gender violence in Global South contexts as well as within marginalized communities in the North, but not in mainstream white, middle class, heteronormative communities (Narayan, 1997).

Rather than perceive gender violence as “traditional” or “cultural,” a transnational feminist framework encourages us to ask questions about how gender violence may occur in relation to shifting cultural, socioeconomic, and political processes. Similarly, Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes the idea of a formulaic “Third World woman” within a universal patriarchal framework, arguing that such concepts result in women in the Global South being stereotyped, frozen in time, decontextualized; and seen as always already victimized by male violence, family, religion, and culture (Mohanty, 2003). As she and others point out, this dynamic also frequently reduces Black, Indigenous, and other women of color to similar stereotypes.

A transnational feminist analysis enables us to explore social, historical, and political explanations for gender violence, as well as the complex contexts and experiences that shape individuals’ lives across multiple differences. In addition, it helps us to recognize the ways people respond to oppression and resistance in distinct ways in different contexts.

Resisting Gender Violence

When U.S.-based activist Tarana Burke first started using the phrase “Me Too” on social media in 2006, she was naming her experience as a survivor of sexual harassment and expressing solidarity with others who had had similar experiences. The phrase became part of a broader movement to end sexual abuse and violence when celebrities like Alyssa Milano began using #MeToo in 2017 as a hashtag after the sexual abuse allegations surrounding Harvey Weinstein (Lakkimsetti & Reddy, 2021). Soon, people around the world were speaking out against gender violence and expressing solidarity with other survivors by sharing the hashtag in more than 85 countries, including Iran, South Korea, Egypt, China, Afghanistan, India, Palestine, France, Turkey, and Nigeria.

While resisting gender violence is critical, we must also be wary of punitive responses to gender violence, which rely on policing, criminalization, prosecution, and incarceration. Such approaches conflict with broader movements for gender, racial, and economic justice. Carceral (penal) feminist strategies for addressing gender violence, which frequently emphasize individual cases rather than the structural forms of violence, have failed (Britton, 2020). Similarly, state responses to gender violence have been problematic because states are complicit in the oppression of marginalized communities and often condone and legitimize gender violence through the criminal justice system, police violence, violence against women in detention and at national borders by immigration officials, sexual violence in prisons, and gender violence by military personnel during armed conflict. In contrast, *abolition feminism*, rooted in women of color feminisms and other radical anti-violence movements, is a politically informed theoretical framework and movement that is critical of the criminal legal system. Abolition feminism rejects carceral solutions associated



Transnational feminism allows women of different backgrounds to reach across borders in solidarity

with increased policing, surveillance, and the prison industrial complex, and instead seeks transformative and restorative justice through greater accountability, mutual support, and more resources for survivors of violence.

It is clear that gender violence results from and reinforces gender oppression, affecting women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people within families, communities, workplaces, and society in general. Gender violence constitutes a public health issue, a human rights violation, and an obstacle to peace and development. Resisting gender violence requires a multi-pronged approach to address multiple levels of violence, including individual experiences of victimization as well as long-term structural forms of violence. As Davis et al. remind us, the movement to end gender and sexual violence “can never be isolated from the work to end state violence, including the violence of policing” (2022, p. 2). As they write, “organizing to end gender violence must include work against the prison industrial complex—against border patrols, against the incarceration of disability, against the criminalization of radical democratic protest—and as centrally, for mutual aid, cop-free schools, reproductive justice, and dignity for trans lives” (p. 4).

Resisting gender violence requires education, resources and support for survivors, accountability for perpetrators, political movement, and a change in how laws are understood and applied. In addition, this work must recognize the specific local histories and contexts of gender violence in order to develop strategies for intervention that will be effective within such contexts. And we must follow the lead of those most impacted: survivors of gender violence.



Activists hold a banner saying C'est Assez (That's Enough), protesting sexual violence

Summary

In this volume, you will read chapters addressing forms of gender violence in various contexts, and in relation to multiple issues. For example, Chapter 3 considers the effects of climate change on gender violence; while Chapter 4 helps us understand the underpinnings of gender violence against LGBTQIA+ refugees; and Chapter 5 sheds light on political and institutional state violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people. Some chapters focus on realms where gender violence may take specific forms, such as within media and technology (Chapter 8), sports culture (Chapter 11), and on college campuses (Chapter 12). In the final chapter, the author discusses activism and resistance to gender violence.

Review Questions

Gender violence includes (select all that apply):

- Sexual abuse
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Sexual harrassment



Intersectionality refers to:

- A focus on one specific form of domination
- Specific ways that markers of identity affect people's experiences of oppression, including violence
- The fact that gender is the primary issue related to gender violence
- A way of ranking forms of oppression



DEVAW refers to:

- The 1993 United Nation's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, passed by the General Assembly
- A grassroots activist organization working to resist gender violence
- An app to document multiple forms of gender violence worldwide
- A Canadian-based movement using social media to highlight domestic violence



Radhika Coomaraswamy, the First Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, focused on which key areas where gender violence occurs (select all that apply)?

The family

The general community

The state



A transnational feminist approach to gender violence (select all that apply):

Accounts for the varied experiences of women around the world

Considers the effects of colonialism, migration, capitalism, and globalization

Encourages a stereotypical perception of women in the "Global South"



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggenderviolence/?p=263#h5p-2>

Answer key: 1. all of the above, 2. b., 3. a., 4. all of the above, 5. a. and b.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is it critical to view all forms of gender violence—such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, sexism, transphobia, homophobia, misogynoir (prejudice or violence against Black women), state violence, and others—through an intersectional lens? How does the framework of intersectionality enhance our understanding of gendered oppression, particularly when considering the experiences of transgender and non-binary people?
2. How do gender norms and roles contribute to the “normalization” of gender violence in society?
3. What are some strategies that address gender violence in different contexts? Why is it important to approach gender violence at multiple levels? What are some values or concepts to keep in mind when doing anti-gender violence work?

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GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE, NONBINARY, AND LGBTQIA+ BODIES

Rebecca Lambert

Abstract

This chapter examines the connections between bodies and gender violence (GV), asking, “How does feminist theory explain the experiences of female bodies?” Feminist theory allows us to analyze our embodied experiences, including experiences of gender violence. This chapter explores how bodies are sites where violence happens; they can be products of violence, they can produce violence, and they can survive violence.

The chapter explores how the intersections of various markers of identity, including gender, race, socioeconomic status, age, ability, geographic location, and more; shape the different ways in which violence is enacted on girls and women, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender, straight, and nonbinary people. In addition, several avenues to activism and resisting violence are explored.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will explain some of the ways in which systems such as patriarchy and capitalism create value-laden binaries and attribute differential values to people with different kinds of bodies
- Students will describe some of the ways in which various markers of identity interact with gender to produce different experiences of violence for people with different bodies
- Students will describe at least one example of activism or resistance to violence against female, nonbinary, and LGBTQIA+ bodies

“Feminism has from the start, been deeply concerned with the body”

(Price & Schildrick, 1999, p. 2)

Second Wave Feminism and Feminist Theories of Female Bodies

The phrase “the personal is political” is rooted in feminist movements. Coined in 1969, it highlights the ways that “personal” problems of gender oppression could be addressed not only on an individual basis, but through political measures and public institutions as well (Mann, 2012, p. 78), establishing a connection between public and private. Issues associated with gender violence—such as rape, sexual harassment, and interpersonal violence—finally moved into the public eye.

At this time, the term “sexual harassment” joined public discourse to finally name the gender-based oppressions women and people of other gender minorities were experiencing at work. The feminist movement in the 1970’s (sometimes also called the “second wave”) is frequently credited with bringing issues related to bodies into focus, for both activists and academics (Schiebinger, 2000, p. 1). Topics related to female bodies included sexuality, menstruation, aging, and—our focus in this book—violence against female bodies. Feminism continues to illustrate that there is nothing more personal, *and* political, than the body (Schiebinger, 2000).

Feminism “involves the implicit claim that the prevailing conditions under which women live are unjust and must be changed” (McCann & Kim, 2016, p. 1), and *theory* refers to ways people “organize what they perceive as reality in ways that make it intelligible” (Mann, 2012, p. 8). Feminist theory, then, helps us understand the “prevailing conditions” of women’s lives, how they affect women’s embodied experiences—and how we can examine these experiences as a way to understand gender violence.

The deep and various connections of female bodies to feminist activism and scholarship are beyond the scope of this chapter; here we examine how female bodies can serve as a framework for understanding gender violence. Connections between key feminist concepts like *patriarchy* and *capitalism* are important for examining the issue of gender violence. *Patriarchy* refers to socially constructed gender norms that attach power to men more than everyone else (Holleb, 2019, p. 195), and *capitalism* names an economic system driven by hierarchical, competitive private and corporate interests in profit.

In a capitalist-patriarchy culture, power traditionally is viewed as power *over* someone or something. (In contrast, feminist conceptions view power as something to be shared.) Patriarchy and capitalism both position female bodies, including their labor and sexuality, as *commodities* (that is, goods and services to be bought, sold, and controlled), within these hierarchical systems of power, creating numerous opportunities for exploitation and perpetration of violence.

Not all female bodies are the same, and females reside in a variety of power structures. As we will see, women’s experiences related to gender are shaped by their existence at the crossroads of their combination of identities, including race/ethnicity, sexual identity, age, ability and appearance, social class/caste, and other unique markers.

Hierarchies and Binaries

Traditional classical views of human bodies divide them into “rational” and “irrational,” or “mind” and “body.” This binary is very much a part of patriarchal social structures and typically carries the following associations: mind = male; body = female. As feminism points out, traits associated with masculinity are valued more highly than traits associated with femininity. This hierarchy sets up other binaries that are used to justify systemic oppressions: thinking over feeling; heterosexual over homosexual; white over black; rich over poor; and perhaps others you can think of.

In addition to positioning men at the top of a hierarchy, patriarchy also establishes *gender roles*, socially constructed beliefs and expectations governing which spaces men and women will occupy, what sorts of work they will do, what social interactions they will have, how they will look, and more; based on the sex they are assigned at birth. Gender expectations are powerful societal norms, and when people (women, men, and those who do not fit neatly into one of these categories) deviate from these expectations, compliance may be enforced by violence. As O’Toole and Schiffman state, “[w]e understand violence as the extreme application of social control. . . . [M]uch of the violence in contemporary society serves to preserve asymmetrical gender systems of power” (1997, p. xii). In other words, violence is used by those in power to maintain their power.

However, it is crucially important to remember that violence is often inflicted upon the bodies of women, children, and other gender minorities *simply because of their membership in an undervalued group*. They need not have broken any expectation or rule; they have not “brought it on themselves.” Feminist scholar Victoria Bromley states that “violence is gendered which means that the violence that is frequently committed against women and girls happens because they are female” (2012, p. 199). When people are valued differently, it is easy to dehumanize them, treat them as “less than,” and from that mindset—whether consciously or not—to inflict violence upon them.

Understanding the concepts of binaries, hierarchies, and the differential valuing of people based on their identities, including their bodies, can help us understand the issue of gender violence. As Price and Shildrick explain, “the body . . . is an indicator of position in hierarchies of power” (1999, p. 18), with female and non-cis bodies at the bottom. Feminist theory challenges these binaries and hierarchies and works to reduce the rank-ordering of people based on their membership in artificial binary groups.

Intersectionality: Identity and Types of Violence Against Women

Feminist legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to emphasize the *multiple* categories of identity (rather than simple binaries) that shape people’s lived experiences. Rooted in Black feminist thought, this strand of feminist theory centers the intersections of race and gender. Understanding that the system of

gender bias is deeply connected with other systems of oppression, such as racism, classism, religious discrimination, ableism, and colonialism, “enables us to recognize the fact that perceived group membership can make people vulnerable to various forms of bias, yet because we are simultaneous members of many groups, our complex identities can shape the specific way we each experience bias” (African American Policy Forum, n.d.). In the next section, we will examine some of the ways in which violence against female bodies is perpetrated differently based on their membership, in one or more of these identifying categories. Examples will show that different bodies experience gender violence differently.

Types of Violence Against Women, Girls, and Other Gender Minorities

Feminist scholarship tells us that gender violence happens across “all racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and age groups, including all sexualities. Gender violence is one of the most pervasive, yet least prosecuted, human rights violations in the world” (Duncan, 2022). Gender violence can also be defined as “any interpersonal, organizational, or politically oriented violation perpetrated against people due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or location in the hierarchy of male-dominated social systems such as families, military organizations, or the labor force” (O’Toole & Schiffman, 1997, p. xii). This broad description shows how varied the experience of gender violence can be, and highlights that it can occur in any type of relationship.

Global Frequency and Statistics

As has been discussed, gender violence is a frequent and worldwide phenomenon. According to UN Women (2024):

- Globally, an estimated 736 million women—about 30% of women aged 15 and older—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life. Rates of depression, anxiety, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and other long-lasting health problems are higher in women who have experienced violence compared to women who have not.
- Most violence against *individual* women is committed by current or former husbands or intimate partners. More than 640 million women aged 15 and older have been subjected to intimate partner violence.
- Almost one-quarter of adolescent girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner or husband.

Importantly, accuracy of available data may be artificially low, due to obstacles (such as access to a reporting organization, or feeling safe to report) that affect the collecting and reporting of incidents of violence.

Women and Global, Ethnic, and Regional Violence

As we have stated, violence against female bodies takes different forms depending on their identities and circumstances. Some of the common types of violence, both global and regional, are described below:

Intimate Partner Violence. Refers to behavior by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors. Also called interpersonal violence or domestic violence. This is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women globally.

Acquaintance Rape, or “Date Rape.” Related to the above is “date rape,” also sometimes called “acquaintance rape,” in which a person (most often a woman, whether straight, lesbian, bisexual, trans, etc.; but also includes girls, boys, and adult males of any gender identity and sexuality) is forced or coerced into unwanted sexual activity (that is, sexual activity without *consent*) by a friend, acquaintance, or peer through any of various methods, including violence or the threat of violence, verbal pressure, misuse of authority (such as by a boss or mentor), or use of drugs, alcohol, or other means to incapacitate the victim (such as if she is unconscious or restrained) (Dude, 2014).

Sexual Violence. Any sort of harmful or unwanted sexual behavior that is imposed on someone. It includes acts of abusive sexual contact, forced engagement in sexual acts, attempted or completed sexual acts with a person without her consent, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, threats, exposure, unwanted touching, incest, and others.

Reproductive Violence. Another way violence is inflicted is through legislation that seeks to restrict bodies. For example, in the United States, policies are continuing to be passed that limit access to healthcare services such as abortion and gender-affirming care, including hormones and surgery. Passed through state and federal legislatures, these policies are enacted on human bodies, and ultimately uphold systems of power and control over them.

Racial Gendered Violence. Bodies are racialized as well as gendered, and both systems play a role in how female and non-cis bodies experience gender violence. Whiteness is depicted as the standard condition and establishes socially constructed norms that makes it seem like non-white female bodies are less beautiful, less sexually pure, and less valuable than white ones (although all women’s bodies are considered less valuable than white men’s bodies). One example of the way Black women experience racialized gender violence is explained by the Say Her Name movement, which highlights the specific experiences of police brutality that Black women face. Also, feminist scholars such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, and Dorothy Roberts have written on the ways that Black women’s bodies have been treated as property, where race and gender both affected the experiences of Black enslaved women (Price & Shildrick, 1999).



#SayHerName banner in New York City highlights police violence against Black women's bodies

Another issue that highlights the ways that race and gender intersect related to gender violence is the disproportionate number of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW). The murder rate for Indigenous women is 10 times higher than the national average (in the United States) and murder is the third leading cause of death for Indigenous women (Native Hope, 2024). Investigating the connections between gender and race help understand the distinct dimensions of GV that Indigenous women face. In 2017, the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) conducted a study that sought to understand the number of factors contributing to this issue. Based on research in 71 cities, they found 506 cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; 280 cases of murdered Indigenous women; and 128 cases of missing Indigenous women. The researchers wanted to understand why the data around MMIW was so difficult to obtain, how that data is tracked, and how media reports on MMIW cases (Urban Indian Health Institute, 2018). The study by the UIHI intended to “provide a comprehensive snapshot of the MMIWG crisis in urban American Indian and Alaska Native communities and the institutional practices that allow them to disappear not once, but three times—in life, in the media, and in the data” (para 3). The study highlights the ways that harmful stereotypes about Indigenous women and people, lack of resources for reporting, and challenges communicating across agencies precariously positions Indigenous women and girls as targets of gender violence. The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement aims to bring awareness to and end this form of gender violence.

Violence during Migration. Women leave their counties of origin for various reasons—to find better opportunities for themselves and their families, leave conflict zones, or escape threats of gender violence. But as they seek supports and better opportunities, migrant women are susceptible to gendered violence, including, among other dangers, sexual assault and human trafficking.

A policy briefing by UN Women outlines the increased risk of gender violence that migrant women face and highlights that migrant women experience violence in all stages of the migration process: from the country of origin, to the transport process, arrival at the destination, and sometimes, the return; gender inequalities increase the risk of gender violence (UN Women, 2021). UN Women report that 83% of detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women and girls, 35% of those trafficked for forced labor are women, and 60 to 80% of migrant women and girls travelling from Mexico to the U.S. are raped at some point in their journey (UN Women, 2020). Gender and

economic inequalities that forced women to leave their countries of origin affect their migration experiences as well, making them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation by smugglers, human traffickers, and police and border guards.

Violence against Trans Women. In our binary-driven culture, people are assigned either male or female at birth. Examining the experiences of trans (transgender) people with gender violence shows how violence may be used to punish bodies that defy constructed ideas of gender. For example, in 2021, a study by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law reported that transgender people are more than four times more likely to experience violence such as rape, sexual assault, or physical assault than are other women (Flores et al, 2021).

Frequency and types worldwide. In a recent report, Transrespect vs. Transphobia documented the murders of over 300 trans and gender-diverse people worldwide. Of these, 94% were trans women or trans feminine people, 80% were affected by racism, and, in Europe, 45% of those murdered were immigrants or refugees (TVT, 2023). In the U.S., 47% of all trans respondents to an online survey reported being sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime; among Black respondents, the rate was 53%, and among people with disabilities it was 61%. Respondents also reported high rates of intimate partner violence, involvement in sex work, and experiences of homelessness (James et al., 2016).

Gender policing in sports. Gender policing in women's sports is not a new phenomenon. Caster Semenya and her treatment by the International Olympics Committee (IOC) is a good example of how female bodies have been targeted for surveillance and violence (Reid & Worden, 2023). During her career, she has been the target of gender testing by the IOC, which tracked levels of hormones such as testosterone in female athletes. This hormone testing is a way to police certain bodies in competition and continue to enforce rigid gender roles, disguised as protecting the integrity of sports.

As women's sports continue to grow in popularity, a great deal of attention has been focused on trans women's participation. For example, swimmer Lia Thomas made headlines as the first trans athlete to win a Division I individual title (Almasy & Sterling, 2024). Her eligibility to compete in women's sports has been debated for various reasons, but a primary claim is that trans women have an unfair biological advantage in sports. While this is still debated, what is established in this conversation is the tracking and monitoring of female athletes' bodies. It is worth noting that the attention given to trans men athletes is not the same, sometimes leaving trans men athletes to compete without debate. The goal of surveilling the bodies of trans women athletes is to maintain stereotypical ideas of what female sports figures should look like.

Human Trafficking. This is a global crime that trades in people and exploits them for profit. Physical and sexual abuse, blackmail, emotional manipulation, and the removal of official documents are used by traffickers to control their victims. Exploitation can take place in a victim's home country, during migration, or in a foreign country.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM). This nonmedical practice involves cutting, scraping, or removing all or part of a girl's, teen's, or adult female's external sexual organs. Reasons given for the practice include that it makes girls more marriageable, controls their sexual appetites, and keeps them virgins until marriage. However, human rights organizations label it "an extreme form of gender inequality" (Farouki et al., 2022) that has harmful mental and physical effects including, among others, "menstrual difficulties, infertility, urinary problems, mental health problems, pregnancy complications, severe pain, infection, septicemia, and even death" (Farouki et al., 2022). Although the

prevalence of FGM is declining in some countries, in others such as Egypt, Somalia, Sudan, Indonesia, Guinea, and Mali, it persists. UNICEF estimates that over 230 million women around the world are living with the results of this gender-based violent procedure (UNICEF, 2024).

Femicide. The intentional killing of a woman or a girl *because she is a woman or a girl*. The gender-related motivation of the killing may range from stereotyped gender roles, discrimination towards women and girls, to unequal power relations between women and men in society. This may also refer to the selective abortion of female fetuses, due to male/son preference in some societies.

Acid Attacks. In deliberate attempts to do physical, psychological, and cultural/social harm, acids of various kinds are thrown at women’s bodies, especially their faces, in many countries where gender discrimination is high, especially South Asian countries such as India—but all over the world, including the U.K. Usually committed by men, as revenge or punishment for some issue in which a woman has gone against what a man feels she ought to do—refusing a marriage offer or a sexual advance, in a dowry dispute, or business or property disputes. These attacks leave lasting psychological, physical, and social/economic scars on the survivors and their families who support them. Categorized as discrimination under CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), and gender violence under international law, attacks are perpetrated indoors and outdoors, by family or by acquaintances; and are made easier by the ease of purchasing acids, the relative lack of laws to track down and punish offenders, and the continued inequalities of gender, class, race, ability, and other markers of identity (Hameed & Bhattacharya, 2022).

Rape as a Tool of War. Sexual violence is often an intentional strategy and tactic of war to create fear, control populations, and destroy communities. Statistics are alarming. According to data from UN Women:

[b]etween 250,000 and 500,000 women and girls were raped in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, more than 60,000 in the civil war in Sierra Leone, between 20,000 and 50,000 in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and at least 200,000 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1996.

(UN Women, n.d.)

While this data is alarming, there are many more assaults that go unreported or undocumented. Rape as a tool of war is now recognized as a war crime and a crime against humanity (UN Women, n.d.). As noted by UN Women, “in June 2008, the United Nations Security Council adopted the landmark Resolution 1820, establishing for the first time that sexual violence during conflict and its consequences pose a threat to international peace and security” (n.d.). This Resolution is one of many intended to end rape as a tool of war, but in addition to policies, mindsets around sexual assault must also change.

Stop Telling Women to Smile

For over 10 years, artist Tatyana Fazlalizadeh has been creating art that challenges patriarchal ideas of women's bodies.

Her project "Stop Telling Women to Smile" is an artist's response to street harassment. She describes this as:

[a]n interdisciplinary project that finalizes as public art. In this project, I interview women and non-binary people about their experiences with sexual harassment in public spaces. These interviews and photographs are then turned into drawings and posters that are placed on outdoor walls. 'Stop telling women to smile' as a phrase represents a few things. One, it means exactly what it reads: stop telling women to smile. So often women and girls are instructed to change their facial expression for the comfort of men. To look nice, approachable, and pretty. Simply put, it is sexist. Even more, the command to smile sits on a spectrum of sexist interactions that happen to women in the public space. While it is not physically violent, its sexist nature has the potential to make women feel uncomfortable, sexualized, and patronized.

Find out more about the project at <https://tlynnfaz.com/stop-telling-women-to-smile>.

Resistance, Activism, and Positive Examples of Change

Social justice movements seek social, economic, and political equality for everyone. In doing so, activism and resistance become critical to creating change. Activism can be defined as "a practice or philosophy of action, in support of, or in opposition to, a political issue" (Holleb, 2019, p. 19). Activism occurs through direct actions such as protesting, and also happens through collaborations and coalitions.

Organizations around the world engage in activist work every day, and this section highlights just a couple of them that are focusing on gender violence and making a positive impact. It is important to point out that these organizations are grounded in the communities they serve. Community connection is important because it centers



Resistance to gender violence ranges from protests to research projects

victims of gender violence by performing the work in the specific cultural, historical, and economic contexts of the regions in which the organizations work.

The Transrespect vs. Transphobia (TVT) worldwide organization is a research project initiated by Transgender Europe. The TVT project highlights connections among gender violence, misogyny, and racism. In particular, the statistic that 94% of victims were trans women or trans feminine demonstrates the ways femininity is monitored, and how violence is used as a tool to maintain control over bodies and to maintain constructed ideals of gender in a patriarchal society (Transgender Europe, 2023).

Another example of a global feminist organization focused on ending gender violence is Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ). This organization is “a Global South-led transnational feminist alliance committed to fostering stronger communities by building trust, nurturing solidarity, and sharing power” (RESURJ, n.d.-b). As they state, “Our work seeks to challenge the status quo, whether in feminist organizing or by applying a justice approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights. These are our main, and often overlapping, areas of work” (RESURJ, n.d.-c), which include: organizing young feminists from the global south, advocacy, creating and joining campaigns that support their mission, coalition building, and generating and sharing feminist knowledge and resources.

RESURJ offers numerous resources for addressing the issue of gender violence. For example, in 2020, they collaborated on a report examining rape as a systemic human rights violation and form of gender violence, written in response to a call for submissions by the UN (RESURJ, 2020). RESURJ also created a 13 Point Action Agenda for sexual and reproductive justice (RESURJ, n.d.-a).

Learning Activity: Understanding Cyclical Violence for Transgender People

Objective: To help students understand the relationship between anti-transgender law and policy and incidents of transphobic violence in specific geographic locations.

1. Divide the class into three to four small groups. Assign each group a geographic area to focus on. Suggested geographic areas can be found below. Have each group identify legal protections for transgender people and anti-transgender legislation/law/policy introduced or enacted in each area.
 - United States South/Midwest (follow this link for help: <https://translegislation.com/>)
 - United States Northeast, West, and Northwest (follow this link for help: <https://translegislation.com/>)
 - Europe and Central Asia (follow this link for help: <https://transrightsmap.tgeu.org/home/>)
2. Create a list of anti-transgender law or policy enacted in the past year in these areas paying close attention to the nature of the law or policy (education, medical, participation in public life) and the political or social context in which this legislation was introduced (political campaigning season, public attitudes, war/conflict). Next, identify instances of transphobic violence that occurred in the area you are studying, especially those that have occurred in the same time as the law or policy you have found. Are there any visible patterns between the introduction of anti-transgender law and policy and upticks in transphobic violence?
3. Have each group present their findings to the class and answer the following questions:
 - What are some examples of anti-transgender legislation (proposed or enacted) you have found?
 - How does this law or proposed policy normalize, encourage, or incite violence against transgender people?
 - What roles do public discourse, local politics, and the media play in shaping attitudes towards transgender people in this area?
 - Did you identify any parallels between increased instances of transgender violence in this area and the introduction/passage of anti-transgender law and policy?
4. As a class, answer the following Questions for Reflection:
 - Based on the case study examples presented in class, do you think there is a direct relation-

ship between instances of transphobic violence and the introduction or passage of anti-transgender legislation?

- How do laws that marginalize transgender people contribute to the normalization of bias and violence against transgender people?
- How do gender norms and gender roles influence how transgender people are perceived in society? What role does the body play in this perception?

A highlight of the work RESURJ is doing is their report on technology related and online violence and harassment that women experience. As social media continue to grow, addressing the harms that women and girls experience online is an important component of activism against gender violence. RESURJ defines technology related violence against women as:

[a]cts of gender-based violence that are committed, abetted or aggravated, in part or fully, by the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as phones, the internet, social media platforms, and email. Technology-related violence against women is part of the same continuum as violence against women offline.

(Association for Progressive Communications, 2017, as cited in RESURJ, 2017)

Their report describes the various experiences of online gendered violence women around the world experience. In the end, they offer several recommendations, which include: a feminist internet, legislation and policymaking that centers the most vulnerable and marginalized in experiences of online GV. This report is helpful for continuing resistance to technology related and online harassment and violence experienced by women, trans, and gender non-conforming people. RESURJ is just one of many organizations working to address social, economic, and political inequalities for women, girls, and gender non-conforming people throughout the world.

While the organizations mentioned above are important to activism and strategies to create change, another form of resistance occurs through larger campaigns, such as *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence*. According to the International Labour Organization, this campaign occurs annually from November 25th through December 10th to promote awareness and action to eradicate all forms of gender violence. As with many activist efforts, the dates of this campaign are tactical, and strengthen the messaging that feminist activism highlights on this issue; November 25th is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and December 10th is Human Rights Day. The *16 Days of Activism* campaign runs parallel to other global campaigns against gender violence in order to create a multi-faceted platform that illuminates the interconnected ways that GV is prevalent in all facets of women's and girls' lives, including the private and public spheres (Hassan, 2024).

Summary

This chapter has examined some of the ways in which traditional, binary views of human bodies have been used to attribute lesser value to bodies seen as female, LGBTQIA+, or nonbinary; and how this valuing lends itself to and justifies violence against these bodies. We have seen how markers of identity such as class, race and ethnicity, geographic location, age, ability, and others shape how female, LGBTQIA+, and nonbinary people experience violence. Finally, we have examined a few examples of activism and resistance against gender violence.

Review Questions

How are bodies a site where violence happens (select all that apply)?

They can be products of violence

They can produce violence

They can survive violence



This chapter discusses two systems that perpetuate gender violence. Which ones are they (select all that apply)?

patriarchy

liberalism

socialism

capitalism



What are some of the conceptual binaries that are used to justify systemic oppression (select all that apply)?

Male over female

Mind over body

Right over left

Heterosexual over homosexual



In what stages of the migration process do women experience gender violence (select all that apply)?

from the country of origin

during the transport process

arrival at the destination

the return



According to a report by UN Women, what percentage of migrant women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation?

10%

83%

45%

97%



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggenderviolence/?p=265#h5p-3>

Answer key: 1. all of the above, 2. a. and d., 3. a., b., and d., 4. all of the above, 5. b.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do the social institutions of patriarchy and capitalism contribute, shape, and perpetuate violence against the bodies of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people?
2. In what ways does the objectification of women's bodies contribute to gender violence? How are the bodies of women and girls used as sites of violence and control in private and public? How do social norms about gender and beauty shape these experiences? How do race, class, gender, and sexual orientation shape these experiences?
3. How are transgender and non-binary people subjected to gender discrimination? What role does the body, and particularly cisgender norms, play in this discrimination? In what ways does the policing of gender roles contribute to physical violence against transgender and non-binary people?

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GENDER VIOLENCE RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Janet Lockhart

Abstract

This chapter examines the effects of climate change and extreme climate events on violence experienced by women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people. The chapter is based on three assumptions: Gender violence (GV) is pervasive across all contexts, including geographical and socioeconomic. Gender violence is often increased in the face of climate changes and extreme climate events, which decrease existing supports and increase already-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Women, girls, and other gender minorities experience GV related to climate change and extreme climate events differently, depending on the intersections of their gender with other identity markers, such as location, age, disability, class/caste, religion, and other dimensions of self. Finally, prevention and mitigation of GV in the face of climate pressures depends not just on international humanitarian aid (which can vary based on changing global political circumstances); but also on leveraging the knowledge, experiences, needs, and skills of the women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people most affected in any given situation.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will explain how climate change/extreme climate events contribute to increased violence against women, girls, and other gender minorities
- Students will analyze the concept of intersectionality as it applies to the varied experiences of women, girls, and other gender minorities affected by climate change/extreme climate events
- Students will describe and evaluate one or more prevention/mitigation strategies in light of factors such as the specific climate change/climate event; location/geography; factors of identity such as class, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation or identity, age, and ability; resources available and/or needed; involvement of those most affected, etc.

How Do Climate Changes Relate to Gender Violence?

At first look, the connections between climate change and gender violence may not be clear. We may assume, for example, that an event like a flood or a cyclone (the word for hurricanes in the Southern hemisphere) would not incite people to violence against one another; and further, that climate change/extreme climate events affect everyone in a region equally. Why would women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people be subject to violence more than cisgender, heterosexual men and boys during and after these events? However, this is exactly the case.

The National Organization for Women explains:

Climate change and natural disasters act as threat multipliers, escalating political, social, and economic tensions in fragile settings, leading to heightened pre-existing conditions and risk factors. While these conditions are harmful and detrimental to all populations affected, they disproportionately affect women, children, and other marginalized communities.

(Duggan, 2023; emphasis added)

The chapter will be shaped by several assumptions about climate change and gender violence:

1. Violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people is pervasive
2. Stressors such as extreme climate events and slow climate changes aggravate already-existing systems of oppression, including gender violence

3. Gender violence related to climate change/climate events affects women, girls, and other gender minorities differently based on their different markers of identity in addition to gender; including sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age, class/caste, religious norms, location/geography, and other factors: the phenomenon of *intersectionality*

In other words, this chapter will demonstrate that climate change/extreme climate events do lead to increased violence; that this violence disproportionately affects women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people; and that women's experiences of violence can be very different from each other based on their particular markers of identity.

Climate Change Is Real—and It Differentially Affects Women, Girls, and LGBTQIA+ People

A related and fundamental concept to the assumptions listed in this section is that climate change is *real*.

“Weather-related disasters are becoming more frequent over time and more deadly, claiming nearly 30,000 lives annually” (Cutter, 2017). In spite of debates over whether climate change is “really a thing,” more than 90 percent of climate scientists agree that the warming has increased beyond “natural climate variability” (Rosen, 2021).



“Heat domes” increase stressors, leading to increased violence, especially against women, girls, and other minorities

According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the primary symptoms of climate change include:

[g]lobal land and ocean temperature increases; rising sea levels; ice loss at Earth’s poles and in mountain glaciers; frequency and severity changes in extreme weather such as hurricanes, heatwaves, wildfires, droughts, floods, and precipitation; and cloud and vegetation cover changes.

(NASA, n.d.)

Globally, relatively slow climate changes (such as increases in ocean acidification, melting of permafrost) as well as extreme climate events (such as cyclones, floods, heat waves, and wildfires) put stressors on people that may include: displacing them; making clean water harder to get/polluting waterways; destroying their homes and farmland/crops/livestock; making fuel and food scarce; loss of sanitation/plumbing; interruptions in vital services such as health services and education; loss of electrical power; illness due to high temperatures and/or proliferation of pests and diseases; and more. Because women, girls, and other gender minorities are already disadvantaged

compared to other groups, the inequalities they face during “normal” times are often made worse when stressful events such as the above occur.

Note: This author accepts the science behind the anthropogenic (human-caused) explanation of climate change. However, it is not necessary to accept that humans have *caused* climate change to see the connections between climate events and increases in violence against women, girls, and other historically marginalized groups.

Gender Violence Is Pervasive

The first assumption is that violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people is pervasive, both historically and globally. The World Health Organization has published an often-cited fact that about one in three women across the world have been subjected to physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives (WHO, 2024). Gender violence occurs in every country, in all climates, and at every level of development (Le Masson et al., 2019, p. 2).

Gender violence (GV) is embedded within hierarchical systems of power such as governments, religious institutions, social structures (including families and communities), corporations, science, education, media, and others. It is used as a “tool of control” (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020) to maintain these systems of differential value and power. Its methods range from almost invisible acts of exclusion all the way to murder.

Gender violence can affect every aspect of women’s lives, and takes many forms (UN Women, 2024), including:

- Verbal abuse
- Physical assault of all types
- Sexual harassment
- Rape/sexual assault
- Emotional abuse
- “Gaslighting” and other psychological manipulations
- Restrictions on reproductive rights and choices (including forced abortions)
- Early or forced marriage
- Selective infanticide
- Economic abuse (controlling household resources, the work conditions, or financial access of another)
- Educational abuses (denying someone access to schooling/training or indoctrination into negative or harmful beliefs about themselves or women in general)

- Female genital mutilation or “cutting”
- Trafficking for various purposes
- Femicide (murder of females)

Climate Change Aggravates Already-Existing Systems of Oppression, Including Gender Violence

The chapter’s second assumption is that stressors such as slow climate change and extreme climate events aggravate already-existing inequalities. When people are forced to choose whom to help or protect; or allocate scarce resources (such as food, water, shelter, medical attention, education, social services, etc.), marginalized groups tend to get prioritized last and treated worst.

“Disasters triggered by hydro-meteorological and climatological events disproportionately impact people who are marginalized” (Gartrell et al., 2020). In other words, since women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people are treated unequally even during stable times; they are the most vulnerable to poorer treatment when crises arise. “Women’s unequal economic and social status relative to men before a disaster strikes determines the extent of their vulnerability to violence during and after a crisis” (True, 2013).

After a climate event, existing inequalities worsen; stressors such as food insecurity and loss of property, failure of law enforcement to investigate crimes, and exposure to high-risk environments such as refugee camps and shelters, also increase violence (Thurston et al., 2021). In fact, “climate change increases the likelihood of all types of violence, including rape, riots, and civil war” (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015).

However, the strongest evidence for the thought-provoking descriptor, “the violence of inequality” (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020), can be seen in the fact that “the bigger the disaster (as approximated by the number of deaths relative to population size), the larger the effect is on the observed *gender gap in life expectancy*” (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015, emphasis added).

Intersectionality Means Women’s Experiences of GV Are Different from Each Other

The third assumption is that the experiences of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people are shaped by intersectionality. Understanding intersectionality (the interactions between markers of identity and the external circumstances that affect people) will help understand the interrelationships between climate change/extreme climate events and the differing experiences of violence inflicted on women, girls, and other historically marginalized groups.

In the following section we will examine several case studies of gender violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people. As you read, pay attention to the factors of identity such as race, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender iden-

tity, socioeconomic status or class; as well as location/geography and climate, that intersect to affect particular experiences of gender violence.

Intersectionality: Identities and Circumstances

As we have seen, women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people are subjected to violence at greater rates than heterosexual, cisgender men; and this violence increases during and after climate changes/extreme climate events. At the same time, each individual may face very different experiences of gender violence depending on where they live, the culture of their community or religion, family structure, the access they have to vital resources and supports, the type of climate issue or crisis affecting them, etc. Below we will consider some examples of the varied experiences of increase in violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people during and after climate events.

Case Study 1: Heatwaves and Femicide of Black Women in New Orleans

During the hottest months of each year in New Orleans, Louisiana, the number of femicides spikes compared to other months. Between April and June 2023, nine women were murdered by intimate partners with guns. All of these women were Black, and eight of the nine were mothers (Raj et al., 2023).

Black and poor communities in New Orleans are already disproportionately affected by systemic racism, easy access to guns, restricted access to abortion, and economic downturns (Raj et al., 2023). Researchers point out, however, that the increase in numbers of women who are murdered during the summer months cannot be explained without considering some additional factors.

Existing research shows that heat waves are often followed by increases in intimate partner violence, especially in lower socioeconomic areas, where residents have higher heat exposure due to the urban “heat dome” or “heat island” effect (where stagnant air makes cities hotter than surrounding rural areas), less access to air conditioning, and increased vulnerability to power outages (Cohen, 2023).

Black women, especially mothers, may have to contend with an increased burden of care as children are out of school on summer break and people may be forced into close quarters indoors. Stressors such as increased costs, food/shelter insecurity, and increased controlling and aggressive behaviors by abusers; may increase the likelihood of intimate partner violence (Raj et al., 2023; Sawas et al., 2020).



Extreme heat in New Orleans increases violence against Black women, especially mothers

Compounded with inadequate responses to heat waves (lack of relief response infrastructure, and limited access to medical treatment, cooling centers, and green spaces), it seems that “violence is not just disproportionately affecting those groups already disadvantaged by systemic racism and economic inequalities but also those disproportionately affected by climate crises” (Raj et al., 2023).

Case Study 2: Increase in Child Marriage Following Flooding and Cyclones in Bangladesh

“Child marriage,” the marriage of two people when one is below 18 years of age, is a human rights abuse (UNICEF, n.d.). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights specifies the right to a marriage entered into with “free and full’ consent” (UN Women, 2012). Since children are not developmentally able to make an informed decision or provide informed consent, child marriage is a violation of this right. Girls are married young six times more frequently than boys are (Siddiqi & Mann, n.d.). In 2018, worldwide 650 million females had been married before age 18 (UNICEF, 2018).

Child marriage is practiced in many parts of the world, primarily in areas where poverty is high and stressors are particularly impactful. “Girls affected by humanitarian crises such as conflicts, droughts, earthquakes and outbreaks, face the greatest risks of child marriage” (Bellizzi et al., 2021). Rates of child marriage increase during both slow climate changes and extreme events.

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change (Pope et al., 2022). In coastal areas, child marriage increased significantly in the 12 months following cyclones and floods, even though at one point it had been declining (Siddiqi & Mann, n.d.). In 2023, half of girls were married before their 18th birthday, and almost a quarter before age 15 (International Rescue Committee, 2023). Reasons given for the increase included:

- Families have lost their homes and incomes
- Girls are seen as a “burden” (even though they shoulder much of the invisible work and serve as “capital” in the community before and after disasters) (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015; Pope et al., 2023)
- Schools are closed, or girls are pulled out in favor of educating boys
- Families are displaced, and fear the prevalence of sexual assault and subsequent loss of reputation in camps or shelters
- Families may have died, leaving young girls orphaned



Child marriage subjects young girls, and some boys, to a range of serious problems

Girls married young are subject to a host of health, economic, and life problems. Besides the trauma of being separated from their families, they are traumatized from sexual activity before maturity. “Child brides” often have complications related to early pregnancy, increased mortality rates for both young bride and fetus or baby, and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. They are often targets of domestic violence, and experience intergenerational poverty from lack of education and economic opportunities. Not least, they are deprived of the joys and freedoms childhood can bring.

Case Study 3: Australian Bushfires and Increased Violence Against Women, Girls, and LGBTQIA+ People

In 2009, an unprecedented drought in Victoria, Australia combined with a 100°-plus heatwave and gale-force winds to ignite a series of catastrophic bushfires (a type of wildfire specific to scrubland). Intensely hot and tall flames consumed thousands of acres of bush, destroyed thousands of homes and infrastructure, and killed nearly 200 people. Investigations after the fires focused on the effectiveness of emergency preparedness, communications, disaster responses, and post-disaster recovery efforts (Stewart, 2025).

Many of these “mainstream” studies failed to include data specific to women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people. Subsequent studies have shown that, in addition to the trauma caused by the fires themselves, these groups experienced significant additional traumas.

Rates of interpersonal violence against women increased by as much as five times among those with higher exposure to the fires. Women (as well as girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minoritized groups) may have been forced to remain housed with abusers, pushed into contact with them while trying to salvage their homes/belongings, or they may have been unable to avoid abusive ex-partners in community shelters. Men’s loss of employment or income, increased alcohol/substance abuse, plus rigid gender roles, further increased gender violence (Thurston et al., 2021). Lesbians and gay men reported harassment in their homes and in shelters, tenuous access to relief services specific to their needs (Dominey-Howes et al., 2022); and a particularly acute trauma at losing their homes, that were strongly associated with their sense of identity as marginalized persons (McKinnon et al., 2016).

Although the rates of gender violence increased, reporting of violence after the bushfires actually *decreased*. Besides lack of access to support services, survivors faced family and community pressures not to report (so abusers wouldn’t “look bad”); fear that perpetrators still had access to them; and police, legal advisors, and healthcare providers who minimized or dismissed their reports (Parkinson, 2019).

Lack of knowledge and concern about interpersonal violence before the disaster, combined with a reduced response capacity, led to these issues not being priorities for responding agencies—and to be neglected in post-disaster recovery efforts, silencing survivors of gender violence related to the wildfires (Parkinson, 2019).

Case Study 4: Droughts, Heat Waves, and Floods Affect Women, Girls, and Transgender People in Pakistan

Pakistan currently faces serious political, economic, social, and climate change issues. Pakistan's economy depends on water-based agriculture, in a water-stressed region where droughts, heat waves, *and* floods are intensifying. Corporations grab land for luxury developments and emissions-intensive big agriculture and production facilities (Sawas et al., 2020), displacing residents. The rural population is migrating into cities, straining water supplies and sanitation. Urban planning is focused on the rich; reduced infrastructure creates special hardships for women and the poor.

Pakistan is also one of the most gender inequitable societies in the world. A patriarchal culture, with binary views of sexual identity and rigid gender roles, excludes women from positions of power and punishes them for speaking up (Sawas et al., 2020). The rate of domestic violence is 34% among married women. Child marriage is also practiced, with some girls married before age 15 (UN Population Fund, n.d.).

The experience of urban poverty and its related issues is highly gendered (Sawas et al., 2020). The urban environment subjects women to higher levels of social instability, depression, and an increased burden of care. Their challenges include responsibility for procuring clean water even when it is not available; greater exposure to the effects of overcrowding (because of limitations on their mobility); and illnesses from sewage, intense heat, and polluted air (Sawas et al., 2020). The combination of migrations, social disruption, poverty, and poor infrastructure increase violence, especially against poor women, men who are not stereotypically masculine, and transgender people.

Transgender people already face a high level of state and social condemnation, including violence. They may be forced to leave their family homes early in life, lack basic education such as literacy (Sawas et al., 2020), and face limited employment outside of sex work (Riaz, 2025). They may experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues more often than the average. In the wake of climate events, they may lose their already precarious living situations, community and social supports, and limited work options. They face increased violence in camps or shelters, and a lack of trained medical and mental health services specific to their needs (Riaz, 2025).



Hijra (transgender people) in Pakistan are doubly affected by social stressors and climate events

Learning Activity: Analyze a Case Study

Objective: Students will examine a case study from the chapter, analyze factors that increased or mitigated against gender violence, and identify one or more strategies for preparing/supporting women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people in those circumstances.

1. In groups of three or four, choose one of the case studies from the chapter. As accurately as possible, describe the following:
 - The climate event or change, its location, and a description of the environment/weather/terrain
 - The people affected and what stressors or changes occurred
 - The type and extent of violence which occurred, on whom it was perpetrated and by whom
2. Analyze the components of the situation. What factors:
 - Worked to increase the vulnerability of women, girls, and/or LGBTQIA+ people to gender violence before, during, and after the specific event or climate change?
 - Increased the likelihood that violent actors would perpetrate violence against the vulnerable individual(s) or group(s)?
 - Did help, or could have helped, mitigate the negative outcomes for women and other gender minorities? (Especially consider factors that empower the affected groups.)
3. Answer the following questions:
 - What programs or initiatives exist in the area to help prepare against climate events and prevent or reduce the particular types of gender violence that occur in the area?
 - Bearing in mind the importance of honoring the wisdom and self-determination of the women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people involved, identify some components that would help prepare the affected people against climate-change-related gender violence in that area. What kind(s) of information or resources could help you refine your suggestions?

Resisting Gender Violence

Efforts to end gender violence related to climate change have some things in common. One of the most interesting is the idea that climate events and gender violence have a reciprocal relationship; that is, events such as heatwaves

and cyclones increase violence against women and girls; and the prevalence of “everyday violence” against women and other gender minorities reduces the resilience of survivors of extreme climate events and other disasters (Le Masson et al., 2019; Rezwana & Pain, 2021). Fortunately, the reverse is also true: efforts that empower women and girls to resist gender violence also make them more resilient in the face of climate events. In addition, strategies that empower women, girls, and other minoritized groups tend to benefit their communities as a whole.

Resisting gender violence in the face of increasing climate changes/climate events may incorporate some or all of the following strategies. Note that, similar to the ways factors of identity intersect with each other, the elements listed below may also overlap and interact.

Involve the Groups Who Are Most Affected

A number of violence prevention and disaster preparedness programs have recognized the importance of involving the most affected people in the planning/prevention, response, and recovery phases of their operations. Many recommend including the perspectives of women and girls, the poorest, and the most marginalized, such as transgender people (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015; Sawas et al., 2020) as the way to make the biggest difference.

Suggestions include supporting women’s community organizations in building networks for managing social and material supports (such as, for example, storage facilities) specific to their communities’ needs (Le Masson et al., 2019; Sawas et al., 2020). Also, since adolescent girls’ “goodwill and labor mediate daily and seasonal acute shortages; they are the go-to safety net for maintaining family and financial integrity” (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015), opportunities for them to share their knowledge and be involved in the work may be invaluable.

As the most impacted by both gender violence and climate events, women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people can be empowered by access to specific resources, such as:

- Services to prevent and respond to GV, including referrals to medical and legal resources
- Financial assistance for issues related to GV
- Education about their legal rights and protections

Violence Against Environmental Activists

Women who stand up for the protection of the environment in their local communities or on a global level are frequently subjected to violence and threats of violence.

In many cases these are Indigenous women reacting to the destruction of their natural environments during extraction and export of monetarily valuable natural resources such as fossil fuels, metal ores, or timber by large corporations. When they attempt to negotiate, ask for intervention from national or international authorities, advocate, speak to the press, protest via blockades—or even just speak up—these environmental advocates are often met with threats and overt violence, ranging from beatings to sexual assaults to murder.

Murders of women environmental activists have happened in all parts of the world, including the US and Europe; but are concentrated in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, where extraction of natural resources is still prevalent (Tran & Hanaček, 2023).

A case in point is the multiple assassination attempts made upon Columbian clean water advocate Yuly Velásquez, who has been shot at in her home and while working to prevent pollution of the Magdalena River by outflow from oil refineries and chemical plants in the area (Otis, 2023).

Although the Columbian government assigned her bodyguards, the threats and attacks continue, and the family of a colleague were threatened with mutilation. The sources and perpetrators of the attacks have not been identified.

Collaborate with Local Communities and Work Across Sectors

“Historically top-down disaster prevention programs without community participation have often failed to reach those most affected . . .” (Lee et al., 2022). More effective models involve collaborating with the members of affected communities. For example:

- Work with religious leaders to apply tenets of holy books to measures that protect the wellbeing of at-risk groups (Le Masson et al., 2019)
- Use local data (disaggregated by gender), to demonstrate the differential harm of climate events to females, and the resulting negative consequences for the entire community (Sawas et al., 2020)

In general, it appears that adhering to “local socio-cultural context[s] are more impactful in changing attitudes and behavioural intentions for gender roles” (Sawas et al., 2020).

Le Masson et al. (2019) remind us that international humanitarian aid programs only work with displaced persons; therefore, ongoing development programs may benefit from incorporating some of their protection mechanisms (such as data collection and prevention activities).

Also, through media, their local bases, or traveling teams, disaster response and anti-violence programs can help disseminate information when governments take actions, such as:

- Passing or updating laws about domestic violence, human trafficking, etc.
- Increasing availability of support services for survivors of violence
- Enacting prevention initiatives specifically targeting men and boys (UN Women, n.d.)

By collaborating with each other and with governments, international organizations can be more efficient and effective at spreading their messages and creating protections across the board.

Prevent by Planning, Educating, and Building Resilience

In disaster mitigation and in anti-violence work, girls, women, and LGBTQIA+ people (and by extension, their communities) can develop skills and strategies *before* stressors increase that will bolster their resilience when stressors happen.

- Education:
 - Create ongoing, large-scale awareness of the consequences of violence against women and girls (Le Masson et al., 2019)
 - Provide girls, women, and LGBTQIA+ people with skills for paid work, managing money, running businesses, etc.
 - Emphasize to communities the connections between gender violence and climate events
 - Teach women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people about sexual and reproductive health practices (Le Masson et al., 2019)
- Encourage the use of Climate Change Gender Action Plans (ccGAPs). These are national development and climate change policies/strategies that have identified gender-specific issues in each development sector (International Union for Conservation of Nature, n.d.)
- Develop climate-resilient (sustainable) growth and development strategies that prioritize alternative (“green”) livelihood options for the poorest and most marginalized (Sawas, et al., 2020), including women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities

Empower the Ones Most Affected

Women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minoritized groups, “typically portrayed as being helpless victims of natural disasters” (Lee et al., 2022), could co-create reciprocal skills and abilities when provided with:

- Explicit equity policies (Le Masson et al., 2019) incorporated into the planning, development, response, and recovery phases of disaster management programs
- Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education and services (Le Masson et al., 2019; Siddiqi & Mann, n.d.), along with
- Medical and mental health services specific to their needs (including providers with appropriate training and experience) (Riaz, 2025)

Since adolescent girls are already both invaluable and invisible in their knowledge, labor, and embeddedness in their communities, leveraging their untapped potential could begin with making emergency responses both “protective of and specifically responsive to the most at-risk populations of adolescent girls” (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015; Sawas et al., 2020). Supporting their needs as well as encouraging their skills could include:

- Creating appropriate roles for them to participate in health promotion, human development, and climate mitigation activities
- Helping them obtain portable social and economic assets (since they are most prone to migrations), including social networking (e.g., through cell phones), identity documents under their control, and financial assets they can access from anywhere (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015)
- Developing targeted strategies, such as financing, vocational training, and life skills education (Siddiqi & Mann, n.d.)



Educating girls can reduce child marriage and increase their resilience during climate events

When women, girls, and other minoritized groups have information, opportunities, and resources, their standards of living and those of their families tend to rise. These strategies will also provide women and girls some protections and increase their resilience to challenges. Equipping women and girls with stronger skills can lead to better outcomes in crisis situations as well as stable times. Focusing on females “may be one of the places where we can have the greatest effect on the future” (Atkinson & Bruce, 2015).

Summary

We have seen that gender violence is pervasive, that it increases with the stressors brought by slow and extreme climate events; and that the experiences of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people can vary greatly depending on the intersections of their gender with other markers of identity, such as race, age, sexual orientation, religion, and location/climate.

Efforts to resist gender violence as well as the increasing effects of climate change should be coordinated. Just as the intersections of women's identities affect their particular experiences of violence, so the leverage of their skills and abilities across sectors will work together to increase their resilience to the negative effects of climate events, as well as to instances of gender violence.

Review Questions

What strategy has been found to be effective in helping mitigate the effects of gender violence before, during, and after climate change/extreme climate events (select all that apply)?

- Strengthening women's and girls' economic resources
- Including local women and other gender minorities in disaster preparedness and risk reduction plans
- Educating people of all identities about the effects of climate change/extreme climate events on the incidence of gender violence



Which of the following is *not* a primary characteristic of climate change?

- Rising sea levels
- Increase in frequency and severity of heatwaves
- Transportation and other infrastructure
- Increase in frequency and severity of cyclones



How many times more frequently are girls entered into child marriage (i.e., before 18 years of age) than boys are?

- 2
- 3
- 4
- 6



What are some markers of identity that intersect with gender to affect experiences of gender violence among women, girls, and people of other gender minorities (select all that apply)?

Geographic location

Physical ability/disability

Class/caste



In addition to existing inequities such as systemic racism, easy access to guns, restricted access to abortion, and economic downturns; which factors related to heat waves lead to disproportionate violence against Black women in New Orleans (select all that apply)?

People being forced into close quarters indoors

Compounded stressors on women and possible increased aggressive behaviors by abusers

None of the above



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggenderviolence/?p=267#h5p-4>

Answer key: 1. all of the above, 2. c., 3. d., 4. all of the above, 5. a. and b.

Questions for Reflection

1. Describe two or three ways in which climate change/extreme climate events contribute, directly or indirectly, to increased violence against women, girls, and other historically marginalized groups (such as LGBTQIA+ people, people of color, people with disabilities, those in poverty, etc.).
2. Explain the concept of “intersectionality.” Give two or three examples (from this chapter or from your own research) of how people with different identity markers (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, class/caste, ability, religion) may experience climate change/extreme climate events differently.
3. Give one example of a strategy designed to reduce the effects of climate-change-related gender violence on women, girls, and/or LGBTQIA+ people in a particular region. What strategies have been found to be effective? What resources or actions are still needed?

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POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTQIA+ REFUGEES

Razan Ghazzawi

Abstract

This chapter discusses gender violence from a postcolonial feminist perspective, focusing on the intersections of displacement, war, race, nationality, sexuality, and gender. It reviews critical frameworks to understand the interconnected relationship between gender violence, asylum, and postcolonial nation-states (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988).

Postcolonial feminists have contributed to gender violence scholarship by describing how war and displacement shape gender relations and the construction of stereotypical gendered and sexual identities. Black queer feminists and critical race theorists have also provided postcolonial approaches to understanding how whiteness and concepts of race are linked to misogynoir (prejudice directed toward Black women) and economic exploitation (Cohen, 2020). The chapter examines two concepts in gender violence scholarship: the problems with homogenizing (assuming everyone in the group is the same) “Third World women” and the “LGBTQIA+ community,” and anti-refugee racism as a site for gender violence. The chapter begins with major queer theory debates on gender violence against LGBTQIA+ people. Then, it covers postcolonial feminist approaches to understanding anti-refugee racism and the diversity of “Third World Women” and “the LGBTQIA+ community.”

Learning Outcomes

- Students will explain the connections between violence against LGBTQIA+ people and war, racism, and displacement/migration
- Students will describe the problems with conceiving of LGBTQIA+ people and “Third World Women” as homogenous groups without considering issues of intersectionality

We are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression.

—*Combahee River Collective (1977)*

Gender Violence in Queer Theory

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, one of the co-founders of queer studies, claimed that institutional homophobia in US culture systematically ruins “queer energies and lives” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 537). She describes the “routine denial to sexually active adolescents, straight and gay, of the things they need—intelligible information, support, respect, condoms—to protect themselves from HIV transmission” (p. 538). To Sedgwick, gender violence against LGBTQIA+ people in the US is shaped by state policies that deny LGBTQIA+ people access to welfare.

Such denial also includes access to healthcare. Sedgwick describes the lack of access to HIV protection as a US policy meant to punish young gay people with death; 54 percent of young gay Black men and 34 percent of gay men under 20 were infected with HIV in the 1990s (p. 538). Sedgwick continues to address gender violence against LGBTQIA+ communities in the US as social, economic, and state policies of denying LGBTQIA+ people’s right to access social welfare; namely, the role of parents, teachers, clergy, and health professionals in damaging teens’ livelihoods and social services. The young gays and lesbians who were forced to leave home because of conflicts with their parents over their non-normative gender and sexual identity comprised a quarter of all homeless youth in the United States (p. 538).



Race, sexual orientation, class, and nationality are targets of intersecting forms of oppression

Another form of violence against queer and trans adolescents is the structural and institutional denial of educational truths to LGBTQIA+ communities. She gives the example of a never-released 1989 report by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the 1991 defunding of all research on sexuality and sexual behavior, both under congressional pressure. Sedgwick concludes with a grim reality; “this society wants its children to know nothing; wants its queer children to conform or (and this is not a figure of speech) die; and wants to know that it is getting what it wants” (p. 538).

Sedgwick states that even for queer and trans survivors, these forms of violence are a form of “surviving into a threat, stigma, the spiraling violence of gay- and lesbian bashing, and (in the AIDS emergency) the omnipresence of somatic [bodily] fear and wrenching loss” (p. 538). According to Sedgwick, gender violence against LGBTQIA+ communities in the US is, first and foremost, a state-led form of institutional violence that targets their access to information, health care, housing, protection, and supportive networks.

Interlocking systems of race, class, and sexuality shape these forms of gender violence against LGBTQIA+ people. Cathy Cohen elaborates on the need to rethink the term “queer” beyond the white, middle-class, and cisgendered gay male category, that could benefit from accessing state social services and human rights legislation (2020).

Centering Race and Class in Framing Gender Violence

Black queer feminists and critical race theory scholars have shown how constructions of whiteness and anti-Blackness have always shaped concepts of gender and sexuality. Cohen urges us to rethink concepts of marginalization and precarity (vulnerability) when thinking about LGBTQIA+ communities and sexuality politics. She suggests shifting

“traditional single-identity-based politics,” where the label “queer” explains the struggles self-identified gay, lesbian, and transgender persons face in their everyday lives (2020, p. 440).



Racism, including anti-refugee racism, is also a focus for gender and LGBTQIA+ violence

Cohen insists that this view of queer identity and politics does not address the “intersecting systems of power” that affect marginalized communities, exploit their labor, and limit their visibility (p. 440). To illustrate this point, Cohen (2020) cites the *Combabee River Collective Statement* highlighting the interlocking systems of oppression Black queer women face in their everyday lives in the US:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (1977)

Cohen stresses that single-issue framework and identity politics “narrowly constructed politics of white gays and lesbians,” which affected who is “truly gay” and “what type of issues would be represented” (p. 448) in queer politics, as well as in scholarship in gender violence. Here, she challenges:

How do queer activists understand and relate politically to those whose same-sex sexual identities position them within the category of queer but who hold other identities based on class, race and/or gender categories which provide them with membership in and the resources of dominant institutions and groups?
(p. 442)

Constructions of gender violence, then, cannot overlook the intersecting relationships between racism, poverty, and non-normative constructions of non-White sexualities. After all, a white cis-gender, middle-class, gay man holds a different positionality of “queer” and access to the state’s services than Black lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people.

Postcolonial Feminist Approaches to Gender Violence

Postcolonial feminists extend Sedgwick and Cohen’s works by questioning colonial methodologies and imperial locations of knowledge production. For example, Chandra Mohanty (1988) presents what can be called a postcolonial feminist critique of certain analytical methods in some Western feminist scholarly texts about Third World women. Her main argument is that these analytical approaches result in the homogenization and misrepresentation of diverse and multiple Third World women’s identities and experiences. Acknowledging the good intentions of the authors she critiqued in her essay, she maintains that their methods co-opt Third World women’s political struggles and demands. She also points out the methodologies reflecting Western authors’ privileges of “ethnocentric universality,” which led to an oversimplified analysis of what she calls “third world difference” (1988, p. 63). This highlights the interconnected relationship between the West as a global economic and political power and its central role in knowledge production in Third World or South countries. According to Mohanty, Western scholarship implicitly assigns itself as a “referent” (norm) in theory and practice when writing about the “cultural Other” (1988, p. 64).



War, labor conditions, asylum, homophobia, and gender violence are intricately connected

The analytical methods she criticizes create homogenous images of Third World women, who are also depicted as collectively and necessarily subject to “shared oppression” (1988, p. 65). Third World women are portrayed in Western feminist scholarship as powerless “objects” and Third World men as responsible for this oppression (1988, p. 68). Third World women, then, are not only seen as a homogenous group based on biology alone—regardless of their class, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and peripheral positions—but also based on (Western) “sociological and anthropological universals” (1988, p. 65).

Mohanty presents five contexts in which Western feminist analytical methods depict Third World women as victims of oppression. Women are presented as subject to male violence (1988, p. 66), dependent on male kinship support (1988, p. 67); or as victims of the colonial process, foreign economic development, and Islamic code (1988, pp. 70-72). She further argues that constructing Third World women as singular and passive objects is an act of “discursive colonization and appropriation” of their histories and daily struggles (1988, p. 64).

Those Western feminist analytical methods are not only an overgeneralization of non-Western cultures; but more importantly, they politically harm Third World women’s struggles. Therefore, Mohanty is wary of the political implications of such feminist analytical approaches to the internal and external challenges women face in Third World countries. In addition, feminist scholarship “exceeds the immediate feminist or academic audience” (1988, p. 62), so that scholarships produced within an imperial location of power risk discursively regulating, misrepresenting, and misreading cultural Others.

Furthermore, Western feminist scholarship assigns itself as patriarchy's "defiant referent," while producing singular Third World women categories as oppressed "objects" (Mohanty, 1988, p. 79). This negates Third World women's personhood on the one hand, and further reinforces their assumed subjugation on the other. Consequently, Mohanty states there is "an urgent need to examine the political implications of the analytical strategies and principles" (1988, p. 64).

This chapter investigates the political implications of methods Western feminists use in writing about LGBTQIA+ refugees in the Third World using Mohanty's relevant critique of their homogenous categorizations of LGBTQIA+ refugees. Ignoring historical contexts and artificially grouping all LGBTQIA+ refugees as the same obscures their social and political agency in dealing with national and transnational oppressions.

Executive Orders and Legislation Target LGBTQIA+ People and Immigrants to the US

Eric Warren

Since the start of the Trump administration there have been numerous attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community and those whose citizenship status is being questioned.

The new executive orders (EOs) attack the LGBTQIA+ community and immigrants; and numerous anti-trans and anti-queer executive orders and legislation are now attacking previously protected rights and access (American Civil Liberties Union, 2025; Trans Legislation Tracker, n.d.). EOs are presidential directives that do not require congressional approval. These attacks come under the guise of *protection* when they are actually targeting the marginalized *other*, restricting access and challenging previously established rights such as access to bathrooms, education, sports, medical services, bodily autonomy, employment, and immigration or asylum status.

Anti-LGBTQIA+ and anti-immigrant bias are clearly seen through the language of protection about birthright citizenship (Exec. Order No. 14160, 2025) and protections from the alleged flood of illegal immigrants (Exec. Order No. 14159, 2025). Considering what these orders vow to uphold and protect, it is not surprising that LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers are facing additional hardships.

Through the suspension of refugee admissions, asylum restrictions, increased deportation, and expansion of ICE raids, no place is safe from these attacks (Gottlieb, 2025; Vera Institute of Justice, 2025).

This administration is using the language of invasion regarding undocumented or illegal immigrants, under the guise of safety and protection for others. While Trump's attacks on marginalized communities are nothing new, the attacks spanning immigration status and LGBTQIA+ access are intensifying. They are increasing surveillance on LGBTQIA+ people (Baum, 2025) and changing the legal definition of sex (Exec. Order No. 14168, 2025), which is impacting LGBTQIA+ immigrants.

Ilon Rincon Portas, a queer nonbinary Venezuelan refugee, detailed their emotional strain, hypervigilance, and need to self-suppress while seeking US asylum. They noted how with the newest EOs they would have been unable to obtain asylum within the United States, which are closing the pathways for safe asylum for many LGBTQIA+ refugees (Rincon Portas, 2025). With the current uncertainty about the state of immigration and LGBTQIA+ safety within the United States, it is more important than ever to take care of each other, supporting one another whenever and wherever we can.

Beyond “LGBTQIA+ Community”: “LGBTQIA+ People” Are Not a Homogenous Group

How can Mohanty’s work on postcolonial methodologies be useful when writing about LGBTQIA+ refugees in the Third World? Rethinking assumptions about a universal “LGBTQIA+ community” is a significant tool for studying questions of asylum, race, and gender relations. The following anecdote illustrates this point.

A few years back, I was presenting at a conference on the invisibility of racism in the area of “Syrian refugee crisis” research (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2019), and literature on queer migration and LGBTQIA+ refugee studies in Lebanon. My comments highlighted the rise of anti-migrant/anti-refugee sentiments from leading Lebanese press, municipalities, politicians, and host communities. My presentation explored the lack of scholarly attention to LGBTQIA+ refugee workers in recent migration, refugee research, and civil society organizing in Lebanon.

To my surprise, I received a comment from the discussant for that panel that my approach escaped the fact that “*all* LGBTQ people face discrimination in Lebanon.” I remember this statement struck me as I didn’t expect an expert in refugee studies to miss the distinction between refugees’ and citizens’ points of view. I wondered how it is possible to blur such distinctions, and their harm.

Here, I recall the queer feminist and transfeminist organizers and writers in Lebanon who wrote about the harm of homogenizing “queer” and “LGBTQ community” categories in Lebanon since the early 2000s (Kaedbey, 2014; Moumneh, 2009, p. 200; Moussawi, 2015; Naber & Zaatari, 2014). For example, Kaedbey argues prolifically against compartmentalizing gender violence against women by centering the migrant women’s movement against racism in Lebanon. Drawing on Black American and Indigenous feminist theories, Kaedbey argues that migrant women’s activism is central to understanding the feminist movement in Lebanon.

The A Project and Qurras are both feminist and transgender-led groups based in Lebanon that have been organizing and advocating for Syrian refugee women and Syrian LGBTQIA+ refugees. This grassroots work is less visible in “refugee crisis” research, most of which addresses the vulnerable positions stateless LGBTQIA+ refugee workers face in Lebanon. To go back briefly to the panel; in the Lebanese context, the homogenization of “the LGBTQ community” as a historical and abstract category overlooks the racist and ableist labor policies, state surveillance, and policing affecting LGTBQ+ workers and undocumented migrant and refugee communities.

The experience at the conference underscored the need to move beyond the liberal identity politics of the “LGBTQ+ community” as a homogenous group. Applying Mohanty and Kaedbey’s critiques is useful in rethinking the dual positions LGBTQIA+ refugee workers face as gender and sexual non-conforming persons *and* as displaced refugees. Questions of border regimes, paperless people, exploitation of cheap migrant labor, and characterization of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as “terrorists” or “rapists” all shape the experiences of LGBTQIA+ refugees in Lebanon. Postcolonial approaches to gender violence against LGBTQIA+ people are critical to better understanding the interlocking systems of oppression, including class, race, displacement, and labor politics, that shape their everyday lives.

The Escalating Torture Crisis Inside the Trump Regime's Detention Facilities Following Executive Orders

Dharmakrishna/Dharma Mirza

LGBTQIA+ refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in the US must navigate some of the world's most complex and brutal institutional obstacles.

For asylum seekers, the systemic inequities render the legal channels established for individuals fleeing persecution effectively null (American Immigration Council, 2024). Trans migrants flee persecution, threats of violence, and discrimination in their home countries, only to face severe barriers upon seeking refuge in the US. Detention periods may span months or even years longer compared to their cisgender peers.

ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agents work tactically to undermine migrant rights. An example is the case of April Amaya-Luis (Nefzi, 2025), who was convicted on questionable charges of assault against an adult male working in her home. Hours before her custody hearing, she was moved to a male facility in Florida nearly 1,000 miles away from her home in Maryland. Following her detainment, Trump posted on the White House X page, falsely claiming April had been arrested for sexually abusing a minor (White House, 2025). Trump and ICE officials insisted on deadnaming her (continuing to use her original name rather than her preferred name) and declared her gender to be immutable and biologically male (Williams, 2025).

As with April, Trump has scaled back humanitarian parole programs that previously provided temporary relief crucial for LGBTQIA+ migrants. The administration's use of expedited removal procedures, bypassing formal hearings, places trans migrants at greater risk of deportation without adequate legal representation or consideration of individual persecution histories.

Also, the *Prison Rape Elimination Act* (PREA) guideline that detention placements align with detainees' gender identities is being largely ignored, with trans detainees frequently finding themselves housed in facilities misaligned with their gender identity; intensifying their vulnerability to violence, abuse, and denial of essential gender-affirming healthcare services (Lambda Legal, n.d.).

The tragic case of Roxsana Hernández exemplifies the devastating human consequences of such systemic abuses. Roxsana, a trans woman from Honduras, had followed legal processes and presented herself for asylum. Investigations revealed that she had been held in a notoriously small and cold cell, denied treatment for HIV, deprived of water, and severely beaten; she subsequently died (Transgender Law Center, n.d.).

Trump's executive orders are deliberately cruel, replacing due process with violence. Hernández's death was the tragic consequence of Trump's deliberate cruelty and disavowal of humanity.

Racism as a Site for Gender Violence Against LGBTQIA+ Refugees in Lebanon

This section highlights the scholarly gap in queer migration and refugee studies around refugee workers' experiences in Lebanon. This literature mostly looked at the Syrian "refugee" perspective while ignoring decades of their migrant labor performed in precarious circumstances—which seems hard to miss, given that it was "Syrian migrant laborers who rebuilt Lebanon after its 1975-1999 civil war," as leftists and queer feminists commonly say in gatherings. Focusing on Syrian "refugees" perspectives without considering their migrant labor in Lebanon since the 1940s positions "refugees" as a humanitarian abstract population deprived of its history (Chalcraft, 2009). The following sections give examples of these scholarly invisibilities and gaps in recent literature.



Street art in Beirut, Lebanon

Brief History of Syrian Migrant Labor in Lebanon

As a Syrian Palestinian blogger and graduate student doing my first master's in Lebanon in 2005, it was hard to miss the visibility of Syrian workers in everyday life in Beirut, Tripoli, and Koura, where my university was based. Wherever I go, I meet and hear about Syrian essential laborers working menial jobs as construction workers, factory workers, farmers, bakers, waste workers, and delivery motorcyclists. The number of Syrian laborers has fluctuated depending on political and economic developments affecting both communities; but Syria labor rights scholars suspect that around 600,000 are working in Lebanon without legal documents, putting many at risk of exploitation by employers and the authorities.

Chalcraft argued that Syrian workers have been involved in a "prolonged pattern of circular migration" (2009, p. 17), where they return and often retire in Syria for the "high social costs (rents, utilities, health, education, transportation, and food)" (2009, p. 21), as well as the lack of Lebanese state subsidies of social services and protection of their labor and their families. Nevertheless, Chalcraft argues that these recurrent hostile and violent conditions did not stop Syrian labor migration to Lebanon despite the artificial Syrian-Lebanese border imposed by French colonial rule in the

1920s; he further argues that Syrian migrant workers are “seasonal” because they do not wish to settle and move their families to Lebanon.

Their migration to Lebanon, therefore, is temporary and strategic; they “accept sweated labor, poor social conditions, political weakness, physical insecurity, and cultural stigma—the elements of subalternity—in return for the economic gains used to fulfill aspirations in Syria” (p. 11). Chalcraft states that during the 1970s, there were approximately two Lebanese workers for every Syrian worker in Lebanon. Initially from border regions, these workers increasingly came from eastern Syria. Chalcraft used the term “elective affinities” to refer to how individual choices forge long-term affinities (p. 327). He argues that Syrian male migrant workers have historically worked in Lebanon not to get settled but to build a small business back home or buy property.

Literature on Queer Migration in Lebanon

Literature on the “Syrian refugee crisis” and queer migration in Lebanon has focused on refugee communities’ lack of access to education, public health, security, housing, and valid migration status following the increase in refugees fleeing the war in Syria since 2013 (Odlum, 2019). The primary focus of this literature was the humanitarian, sociopolitical, economic, and legal dimensions of the refugee question, without considering that many of these refugee communities have been and continue to be also migrant workers, farmers, bakers, and other menial laborers (Dionigi, 2017; Janmyr & Mourad, 2018).

Another body of work examines the intersectional sociological research on gender and the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. It explores the precarity of refugee gay men and questions of gay masculinities in contexts where the dominant focus of gender refugee research was on women and children (Daigle & Myrntinen, 2018; Khattab & Myrntinen, 2014; Maydaa et al., 2017). Other scholars have argued that the lack of access to social services became more evident after Lebanon closed its borders with Syria in 2015 in response to the rise of refugee numbers in the country following the outbreak of the 2011 popular protests in Syria (Blanchet et al., 2016; El-Khatib et al., 2013).

Finally, Others looked at how LGBTQIA+ organizations in Lebanon (and Turkey) “coach” LGBTQIA+ refugees on how to apply for asylum at the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) according to Northern assumptions about non-normative sexuality and gender expressions (Greatrick, 2019).

This hyper-focus on the “refugee” perspective and “LGBT refugee vulnerabilities” and the invisibility of their “migrant laborer” perspective further solidifies the power structure and exploitation of their everyday lives as migrant and stateless laborers in Lebanon. While much of this literature describes multiple sites of violence faced by refugees every day in Lebanon, such as border closure and medical neglect, unaffordable residency expenses, expired visas, and state and army policing; it is within the framework of the “refugee crisis,” suggesting such forms of violence against Syrians in Lebanon are connected to the humanitarian implications of the Syrian state’s war. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this legacy of anti-refugee racism in Lebanon goes back to the civil war (1975-1990), the Palestinian camps, and the Syrian state’s 25-year occupation of Lebanon, which makes the focus on racism against LGBTQIA+ refugees and workers an urgent site for scholarly examination.

Learning Activity: International LGBTQIA+ Refugee Support Agencies

Objective: Students will examine several international LGBTQIA+ refugee/asylum seekers support agencies and analyze the relevant logistical, political, religious, financial, social, and identity factors that intersect in the lives of the people affected.

1. Divide the class into 3-4 small groups. Assign each group an agency to explore from the list below.
 - Outright International: [MENAReport2018.pdf](#)
 - It Gets Better: [Resources for LGBTQ+ Migrants, Refugees, and Asylees – It Gets Better](#)
 - International Railroad for Queer Refugees: [Home – IRQR](#)
2. Have each group answer the following:
 - What is the group's mission?
 - How is it funded?
 - How does it operate?
 - Which population(s) do they serve?
 - How are potential clients identified/how are they connected with the agency?
 - What needs are addressed, and how?
 - What are the logistics of helping clients relocate?
 - What can you determine or infer about the stance of the agency (that is, what is their attitude or approach to their clients? Are they sensitive to their intersecting markers of identity? How do they work to empower their clients?)
 - Is the agency well regarded by others in the field? What is their reputation? How do they appear in the press and in charity rating sites such as Charity Navigator or CharityWatch?
 - Do they partner with any other agencies, and if so, how?
 - What obstacles do they face?
3. As a class, answer the following discussion questions:
 - How do political and religious norms of the country or region served affect the conditions under

which LGBTQIA+ people are living?

- Which factors might increase anti-LGBTQIA+ violence or oppression?
 - Which factors might increase support and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people in the country or region?
 - In addition to nonprofit aid agencies, what are some complementary approaches to increasing support and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people in their home countries? In receiving countries?
4. For further learning, search for and explore LGBTQIA+ refugee/asylum seekers' aid agencies in your country, state/province, or locality and answer the above questions.

Racism as Gender Violence Against LGBTQIA+ Refugees in Lebanon

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork between 2018 and 2019 with 10 self-identified Syrian and Palestinian LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers, I argue that anti-refugee racism is a site for gender violence against LGBTQIA+ refugees in Lebanon. My conversation partners, who identify as lesbians, bisexuals, trans men, trans women, and gay men, explained that they were not able to build affinities within the exploitative labor conditions in Lebanon as LGBTQIA+ migrant workers. They were forced to apply for asylum shortly after arriving in Lebanon as a result of these conditions. They also described these exploitative work conditions as “racist” and part of the anti-refugee sentiments fueled by political leaders and opposing right-wing parties in Lebanon.

Most of my conversation partners express that they navigate Lebanon within curfew hours and where checkpoints are located in each neighborhood. This is especially true in Beirut and the roads towards Beqaa and Tripoli, where they feared being caught at security checkpoints as paperless persons without valid residencies. Some shared that they also feared speaking in public with their Syrian and Palestinian dialects; many developed a Lebanese dialect to ensure less visibility in public and workspaces. Some also expressed they walked for long hours to avoid checkpoints and getting detained as paperless persons. For example, Somar, a self-identified Syrian gay man, told me, “I avoid highways and big streets—a lot of checkpoints. I walk in the alleys. They take more time, but they are beautiful. I make sure I don’t talk in my Syrian dialect in an area I don’t know.”

Another conversant, Sara, a bisexual Palestinian trans woman, shares with me her fear of being exposed as a Palestinian at checkpoints, which, in her view, is similarly risky in Lebanon. She recalls the Lebanese army’s destruction of Nahr el-Bared camp under “terrorism” charges by the Lebanese state. Palestinian and Syrian LGBTQIA+ refugees have both been portrayed as “terrorists” in the local media and right-wing political leaders’ speeches, further putting them at risk in workspaces and their everyday lives. Thus, the once scapegoated Palestinian refugees now became Syrian internally displaced persons. The raids, curfews, stricter laws to renew residencies, checkpoints, and forced return of refugees to Syria—all were part of carceral surveillance directed at anyone who looked “suspicious” in Lebanon,

including refugees and Black and South Asian migrant workers. Anti-refugee racism in Lebanon has become a public and socially accepted form of racism.

Summary

This chapter uses postcolonial feminist approaches to gender violence against LGBTQIA+ refugees in Lebanon. It offered an overview of gender violence as a framework in queer scholarship by looking at Sedgwick's approach to institutional and state-led gender violence and Cohen's intersectional approach to racial, gendered violence against LGBTQIA+ persons in the US. The chapter extends this conversation by bringing postcolonial feminism into gender violence scholarship, particularly by drawing on Mohanty's classic work on white feminist methodologies and research on "Third World women" as a homogenous category.

The chapter critically investigated this tool and argued against researching Third World LGBTQIA+ people as a "universal" and "homogenous" category. It gave a brief history of the interconnected relationship between Syrian migrant labor and anti-migrant racism in Lebanon, which led to ongoing anti-refugee racism against LGBTQIA+ refugees in Lebanon today. Finally, by focusing on LGBTQIA+ refugees in Lebanon as a different subjectivity from LGBTQIA+ citizens in the Third World, the chapter argues that anti-refugee racism is a site for gender violence that requires much-needed attention in queer migration and policy research.

Review Questions

According to Sedgwick, what are some of the types of violence against LGBTQ+ people in the US (select all that apply)?

- Institutional homophobia
- Denying their right to access social welfare
- Denial of educational truths
- Lack of access to human rights legislation



According to the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, which types of oppression intersect in the experiences of Black lesbians (select all that apply)?

- Racial
- Sexual
- Heterosexual
- Class



According to Mohanty, what are some of the ways in which Western feminist frameworks depict Third World women as oppressed and/or victims (select all that apply):

- They are victims of foreign economic development
- They are all similar, based on biology
- They are subject to male violence
- None of the above



Transgender individuals in the US are seeing which previously established rights restricted or challenged (select all that apply)?

- Access to appropriate medical services
- Ability to use bathrooms aligned with their gender identity
- Birthright citizenship
- Equal access to employment opportunities



Racism against refugees/asylum seekers is experienced as gender violence by LGBTQIA+ people in Lebanon in which of the following ways (select all that apply)?

- Exploitative working conditions
- They must avoid checkpoints due to lack of documentation
- They avoid using their own dialects in public
- None of the above



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=269#h5p-16>

Answer key: 1. a., b., and c., 2. all of the above, 3. a. and c., 4. a., b. and d., 5. none of the above

Questions for Reflection

1. Based on Sedgwick's (1993) article "Queer and Now," what are some forms of gender violence against LGBTQIA+ youth in the US?
2. How does Cohen's (2020) article develop notions of gender violence against LGBTQIA+ people by centering race and class politics?
3. Based on Cohen's article, what is the harm of focusing on the stereotypical views of "queer" and "the LGBTQIA+ community" without incorporating an intersectional framework?
4. What does Mohanty (1988) mean by "Third World women are not a homogenous group"?
5. Why is it problematic to homogenize LGBTQIA+ communities as one group? Who is usually left out of the conversation?

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND INSTITUTIONAL STATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Maria Franco-Garcia

Abstract

This chapter examines some of the types of widespread political and state/institutional violence perpetrated on women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people. We see how power structures serve to perpetuate inequalities and condone various forms of violence, shaped by the intersections of identity, such as race, age, class, ability, and other factors. We also examine some programs and practices in place to resist these forms of violence, and consider recommended actions to further this work.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will describe the types of political violence faced by women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people
- Students will describe the types of state/institutional violence faced by women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people, and distinguish between political violence and state/institutional violence
- Students will identify factors that intersect to affect women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people differently
- Students will explain effective practices against political and State/institutional violence

The Challenges of Political and Institutional Gender Violence

Combating all forms of violence against women is one of the global challenges we face as a society in the 21st century. Scholars of gender violence (also called gender-based violence) have described the multiple ways in which this violence is shaped and expressed (Davis, 1983; Fraser, 1990; Krook, 2020).

This helps us understand the links between concrete experiences of violence in the lives of many groups of women, and different systems of social oppression—such as capitalism and its class structure, racism, colonialism, or heteronormativity—that affect and condition the lives of all.

However, cataloging the chorus of voices protesting the multiple forms of violence against women should go beyond simply identifying its causes and expressions. States (governments) and multilateral agencies have joined forces around the world to build effective mechanisms to combat and eradicate violence against women. For international organizations and national public authorities throughout the world, the goal is to guarantee universal access for all women to fundamental human rights and the full exercise of citizenship.

Institutional efforts and good practices have been mainly and originally the result of the social organization and political mobilization of *women*. The global feminist movement, including the many different struggles for the liberation of women from male and patriarchal oppressions, has historically fought any and all forms of violence against women.

The World Health Organization defined violence in general as the “intentional use of force or power, in threat or in practice, against oneself, another person or against a group or community that results or may result in suffering, death, psychological harm, impaired development or deprivation” (Dahlberg & Krug, 2006, p. 1165). WHO makes it explicit that *intentionality* is a requirement for an act to be labeled as violence; therefore, situations that are not intentional, such as accidents, are excluded. In other words, when someone uses the power he has, either by not acting when he should prevent the violation of a right, or by actively committing violence, both are cases of violence. The effects of violence are not restricted to physical damage or death itself; they can also include psychological harm or damage to society.

It is important to realize that experiences of violence, within our societies and communities, are not one-dimensional. People’s social and political experiences of violence are affected by their overlapping situations (intersections) of social class, race, age, ability, gender, sexuality, and gender identity. Violent oppressions and exploitations tend to persist, revealing the most perverse patterns of inequality and injustice. This means that violence happens within *systems*, with both public and private dimensions of oppression (Mies, 1986; Young, 1990).

In many of today’s societies we are dealing with inequities in: class and racial discrimination; patriarchal oppression; religious marginalization; sexism; transphobia; homophobia; biphobia; violence in institutions; preventable maternal mortality; violations of civil, political, social, economic, cultural, and environmental rights; discrimination in the labor market and in access to education; incarceration; vigilantism; and state violence through public death policies.

For historically dominant groups—male, white, middle class, heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon, Christian, adult—political violence has functioned as a fundamental tool for the maintenance of inequalities and the monopoly of power (Elias, 1994).

In this context, women all over the world rise up and demand concrete actions against political violence and institutional and/or state gender violence.

Gender-Based Political Violence and Political Violence Against Women

Although the specific terms are relatively recent, “gender-based political violence” (GBPV) and, particularly, “political violence against women” (VAWP, or “violence against women in politics”), have been practiced for a long time. In the 1990s, there were efforts to recognize rape as a tool of war, and since then feminist political scientists have expanded the definition of political violence (Krook, 2020). The term refers to any action or omission, carried out directly or through third parties, that attempts or causes harm or suffering to one or more women for the purpose of nullifying, preventing, discrediting, or hindering the enjoyment and exercise of their political rights, simply because they are women (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015).

Political violence against women is also found in their historical exclusion from spaces of power, both institutional and private (Sanín, 2018). Violence against women in political life is a global and systematic phenomenon that limits their rights to political participation and representation (Krook, 2018).

The absence or inadequate institutional representation of women is not a coincidence, but the result of cultural processes that tend to limit the presence of women in political institutions, even in a time when many countries have formally codified the equality of civil rights.

If we recognize the exclusion of women’s power as a *pattern* of society and its institutions, we can understand gender in relation to the types of patriarchal powers that dominate the organization of our societies.

Although the first type of political gender violence is exclusion from politics, it is not the only one. Preventing women from holding public office, voting via secret ballot, associating and assembling freely, campaigning freely, and exercising freedom of opinion and expression are all manifestations of violence against women in political life.

The conclusion is that this violence is a reaction to the increasing participation of women in politics, as they are becoming more qualified and more effective (Ballington, 2018). Violence against women who dare to overcome conventional barriers and act in politics—both in institutional politics and in social activism—comes in different forms. These overlap and converge in their objectives, which are to limit women’s political action and delegitimize their performance in the conventionally masculine space of politics.

Expressions of Political Violence Against Women

The forms and manifestations of political violence against women can be both physical (bodily, sexual) and non-physical (symbolic, moral, economic, emotional, and psychological). Among its many forms, it is common for political violence to occur through:

- Frequent interruptions of women’s voices in political environments
- Disparaging women’s abilities, causing them and others to doubt their ability to perform their functions
- Disproportionality between men and women in the distribution of party funds (i.e., men receive more funding than women)
- Diversion of resources for male candidates
- Threats, humiliation, or blackmail of women political candidates; through words, gestures, or other means
- Defamation, slander, or insults to women political candidates
- Once women become part of the political party, violence manifests itself when:
 - They are not nominated to lead parties, be rapporteurs (recorders and reporters) of important projects, or be full members in commissions or committees
 - They are constantly interrupted in their places of representation
 - They are excluded from debates
 - They are judged by their physical appearance and the way they dress
 - They are questioned about their choices in their private lives, relationships, sexuality, and motherhood

Cases of Political Violence Against Women

Example 1: Hostile Political Environments: This is a global form of political violence against women within the political institutions of various states. It combines the processes of environments which try to dismiss and erase political arguments and the role of women in parliament, with attacks against the person—the woman herself—rather than against her political ideas or initiatives. Those who engage in these violent practices demonstrate that they do not recognize the equal status of women as parliamentarians or political representatives, do not accept women’s autonomy of thought and action, and especially do not accept any opposition arising from them.



Brazilian councilwoman Marielle Franco, a black woman, lesbian, and defender of human rights

In other words, those who use political violence against women, within the power institutions and spaces of the state, seek to silence them, even though they are performing duties for which they were elected. Those who use this violence tend to control the access and permanence of women in the parliamentary political arena and other spaces of power. That is why these harms violate women's political rights. Extreme (radical) forms of this behavior can reach the point of physical violence, and even femicide.

Example 2: Pre-election and Election Periods. Another global example of political violence against women is that which takes place during election periods. Although political violence occurs in many contexts, it has especially serious and particular consequences for women during electoral periods. Political tensions and fierce competition during elections can create vulnerabilities for the participation of women in politics, who in many cases are already at a disadvantage compared to men, and can lead to their exclusion from the process. Electoral political violence against women defines any type of aggression aimed at interfering with women's direct action in political life, such as limiting parliamentary action, silencing their voices, imposing, eliminating and restricting activities in campaigns, dissuading them from participating in the electoral process, and/or preventing elected women from taking office. It is also a violation of national criminal or civil codes that harms female voters, candidates, election officials, activists, and security and political professionals around the world, occurring both online and offline (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2017).

The reasons for violence against women who participate in electoral processes are the threat they pose to the supremacy of a male power structure, as well as a form of punishment for not fitting into the traditional gender, class, race, religion, and morality roles assigned to them (Sanín, 2018). Therefore, some forms of this electoral political violence can be seen as an adverse reaction to the simple presence of women in public life. Some of these specific manifestations of gender-based political violence include preventing women from voting autonomously, dissuading women candidates, or forcing elected women to resign.

Whether in the context of the family, the community, or the state, in public or private spheres, acts of violence against women become acts of political violence when they have a negative impact on women's exercise of their political rights and, in particular, in an electoral process.

As women become more visible in politics and increasingly occupy this space, there has been a worldwide increase in political violence against women (Ballington et al., 2017). Media and communication technologies play a relevant role, as they seed the ground with negativity, prejudice, and aggression against women in public and elected positions. Networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Tik-Tok, Instagram, X, and Snapchat present opportunities to become spaces for a great spread of political violence against women (UN Women, 2021). Disinformation campaigns of a sexual nature or discrediting the professional achievements of female politicians are common, spreading false stories about their personal lives. Online VAWE is an expression of online misogyny and a concrete form of abuse, which creates significant obstacles to women's equal participation in public and political life. It also affects women's right to freely express their opinions.

Political violence against women in elections is used to achieve a number of political objectives that can vary according to the type of aggressor: state agents, political parties, or other groups with an interest in the outcome of an electoral political process. Perpetrators can be of either sex, although the majority are men (Fisher, 2012).

VAWE manifests itself through harassment, embarrassment, and threats, with the aim of preventing or hindering women's electoral campaigns, or the performance of their elective mandate (duties). Some of its impacts are: limiting the visibility and funding of women in political party campaigns; reducing the number of elected women; forcing the resignations of elected women; fewer women opting for a political career and more women leaving early; the difficulty of recruiting women for polling stations; fewer women than men turning up to vote; and a decrease in women's political activism (Fisher, 2012).

Globally, one of the most serious effects of VAWE is the under-representation of women in the political sphere. This is a significant problem that jeopardizes the strengthening of democracies globally. This scenario decreases the diversity of political representation, neglecting the realities and identities of women around the world. The global persistence of sexist and patriarchal cultures continues to reinforce gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices, which makes it difficult, or even impossible, for women to achieve formal political participation.



Online electoral political violence against women (VAWE) is widespread

Erasure of LGBTQIA+ and People of Color in Anti-DEI Executive Orders, Policies, and Practices in the U.S.

Anita K. Gándara

A series of executive orders, including ones targeting the LGBTQIA+ community, kicked off the beginning of the 2025 Trump administration.

Most concerning is the language in the executive orders, which perpetuates hate-filled rhetoric and the erasure of the LGBTQIA+ community. Executive orders (EOs) are directives issued by the president that embody the policies and values of the current administration. While they do not have the “force of law,” they can have a ripple effect that leverages federal power.

The Trump administration’s EOs frame diversity, equity, and inclusion as “radical” (Exec. Order 14151, 2025), and respond to inclusion initiatives by claiming “illegal discrimination” (Exec. Order 14173, 2025), while denying the country’s history of enslavement and the intergenerational reasons why these programs were initially established. Not only do these orders impact people of color, but the rhetoric used in them specifically targets the LGBTQIA+ community. Many of these executive orders are full of anti-queer and anti-trans language that frames their efforts as “protecting women” and preserving “biological truths” (Exec. Order 14168, 2025) to justify LGBTQIA+ erasure.

Executive Order 14190 (2025) talks about “indoctrination” in K-12 schools, referring to schools teaching various social scientific topics, including systems of oppression, the history of racism in the US, and other social systems particularly targeting the LGBTQIA+ community. Section 2.e defines social transition as “the process of adopting a ‘gender identity’ or ‘gender marker’ that differs from a person’s sex.” Essentially, this section of the executive order restricts conversations about gender identity and even prohibits the use of students’ preferred names and pronouns. This harmful rhetoric puts children at risk because restricting inclusive discourse in schools strips away the classroom as a safe space for all students, but in particular, LGBTQIA+ youth.

Similarly, Executive Order 14173 (2025) targets diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in institutions of higher education. Dangerous rhetoric is woven into the language that accuses DEI initiatives as “illegal” and “corrosive.” The Trump administration is targeting colleges and universities by threatening to withdraw federal funding unless they terminate all programming, resources, and initiatives under the umbrella of diversity, equity, and inclusion. By doing so, the current administration is destroying decades of progress rooted in the advocacy and hard work of previous generations of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ college students and faculty alike.

Amidst unprecedented times, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and discouraged. However, we must engage in queer resistance to reject erasure from the people in power. It is critical to immerse yourself in queer joy and create community. Increasing queer visibility is one way to start making

connections and you can do so as simply as wearing buttons (pronoun pins or pride flag buttons) to show others you are a safe space.

Keeping up with community organizations is a good way to find local events/fundraisers, take advantage of volunteer opportunities, and stay up to date with political news. The Human Rights Campaign is the largest LGBTQIA+ civil rights organization that fights for visibility and support for all members of the LGBTQIA+ community (n.d.). Stay updated with their [involvement page](#) and newsletter for the most current information.

Institutional Violence and State Institutional Violence Against Women

Institutional violence against women (IVAW) and, particularly, Institutional Violence of the State (IVSAW) are forms of political violence, which are exercised specifically in institutional and associated spaces. IVSAW refers to any abusive action or omission by any public servant that discriminates or aims to dilute, obstruct, or impede the enjoyment of the fundamental rights and freedoms of women; as well as any action or omission by state bodies that results in physical, psychological, or social harm to women. Institutional violence by the state against women can be direct, such as the excessive use of force or intimidation by security forces, or indirect, such as the implementation of policies that perpetuate inequality and the social exclusion of women.

The term IVAW describes exclusion of women from diverse institutional spaces, or their precarious inclusion; that is, their participation with less autonomy and decision-making power, less control over resources, and more generalized patterns of systemic gender inequality. These dynamics are present from social organizations such as NGOs and popular movements to institutional policies of states.

IVAW can also be seen as a specific manifestation of structural violence against women. For Galtung (1969), structural violence refers to forms of violence that are not direct or physical, but are embedded in social, political, and economic structures, producing inequality, exploitation, and marginalization without a visible aggressor.

This form of violence is systematic and manifests itself through institutions and social norms that perpetuate inequality and injustice. In the case of IVAW, structural violence against women is manifested through social and cultural norms, such as patriarchal values—which assign women secondary roles in the family and society—and social structures, which perpetuate gender inequality and access to full citizenship, such as: labor and economic inequality, unequal access to formal education, gender violence, and limited access to justice and to health and reproductive services.

One of the most serious consequences of IVAW is the continuation of the mechanisms that naturalize gender inequality, legitimizing them, which hinders social mobilization against gender injustice.

When the state, through its representatives and institutions, does not act in accordance with its obligations, or acts against them and does not strongly condemn the discrimination and impunity of the aggressions suffered by women, it perpetuates institutional violence against them, in this case IVSAW.



Surveillance against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people takes many forms

According to Foucault (1975), state institutions exercise power and control over individuals through systems of surveillance and discipline, from which forms of state violence emerge. This form of violence is emblematic precisely because it is committed by those who have the duty to act, within the framework of a democratic state under the rule of law, strictly in accordance with what the law says and to guarantee human rights to all people, regardless of gender, class, ethnicity, race, or other socio-cultural condition. As Rebeca Cook states:

When a state applies, executes or perpetuates a gender stereotype in its laws, public policies or practices, it institutionalizes it, giving it the force and authority of law and custom . . . it provides a legal framework to facilitate the perpetuation of discrimination over time and across different sectors of life and social experience.

(Cook, 2010)

Forms of Surveillance

Surveillance is the practice of observing, monitoring, and collecting information on individuals or groups by the government, intelligence agencies, corporations, and law enforcement.

It takes many forms, such as: video or audio monitoring, digital data collection/tracking, electronic surveillance, biometric surveillance, border control, location services tracking, and predictive policing/over-policing of marginalized communities.

Societal surveillance in these forms lends itself to a form of governmental or policing control where an individual is made to feel as if they are constantly being surveilled, which then causes the individual to engage in self-monitoring or self-censoring. This shapes a person's ability to freely participate in society as it limits their freedom and enforces government-ordained social norms.

Authors such as Davis (1983) and Crenshaw (1991) have defined gender violence as a form of state violence against women. For Davis, gender violence cannot be dissociated from state violence. Her analysis of the prison system in the USA shows how it perpetuates violence against women, especially Black women, through mass incarceration and constant surveillance. Davis also criticizes how the state often fails to protect women from domestic and sexual violence, reinforcing the idea that these forms of violence are “normal.” Crenshaw examines how institutional state violence affects women differently depending on their intersectional identities, such as race, class, and sexual orientation. For this author, Black and poor women face specific forms of institutional violence that are not only gendered, but also racialized and economically motivated. Segato (2016) goes further and develops the “Theory of the War Against Women,” in which she expresses the idea that gender violence is a form of systematic war against women, part of an institutionalized social and political order that seeks to maintain patriarchal power and control.

Reproductive violence is also considered a globalized form of IVSAW. In many countries, public reproductive health policies limit women's autonomy over their bodies. This includes practices such as forced sterilization, criminalization of abortion, and unequal access to reproductive health services. Roberts (1997) denounced in her research how in the USA the state exerted control over the reproduction of Black women, through the implementation of population control policies (“eugenics”). She also showed the criminalization of motherhood in contexts of poverty, racism, and exclusion, as in the case of pregnant women who use drugs, as another of the IVSAW practiced in the USA.

Sexual violence in armed conflicts is also a form of IVSAW. In contexts of war and conflict, the state can be an accomplice or even the perpetrator of sexual violence against women. For Enloe (1989), militarization and armed conflicts affect not only international relations, but actually increase gender violence and, in these contexts, it is the state that uses women's bodies as a battlefield. A report from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2014) shows how this happened during the Bosnia and Herzegovina War (1992-1995), where systematic sexual violence against women and girls was used as a weapon of war. Similarly, periodic reports by international organizations such

as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, or UN Women publish global data on the historical and current use of sexual violence against Palestinian women and girls in the Gaza region.

Forms of Institutional Violence Against Women

State violence against women is practiced by public bodies and individual agents who should be responsible for the care, protection, and defense of women. It occurs essentially when the act of violence is committed by a person in the performance of his or her duties in a public institution, or when he or she tolerates/does not prevent a discriminatory act due to negligence, ignorance, or failure to attend to cases of gender violence with due diligence. Institutional State violence against women can be exercised by the police, Public Prosecutors' or District Attorneys' Offices, judges and magistrates of courts, school authorities, or any other agent of authority, by acting, or failing to act, in ways that violate a person's rights and/or threaten their dignity and personal and family integrity. A state's failure to comply with the obligation to protect women can generate international liability.

In police investigations. This occurs when a public agent subjects a woman who is the victim of a penal infraction or violent crime to unnecessary, repetitive, or invasive procedures that make her relive situations of violence, or generate further suffering (UN/CEDAW, 2004).

In police actions. Women who may have been investigated, arrested, and/or incarcerated may suffer psychological abuse, sexual harassment or intimidation, threats, sexist treatment, and/or sexual violence, often with no repercussions for the police offenders.

In prisons and other penitentiary environments. Women can be harassed and subjected to indignities such as illegal search or sexual assault when they are in prison or when they are visiting relatives or friends in prison.

In public educational institutions. This can be perpetrated by public agents, professors, members of management, other employees, and members of the student body. The public agent takes advantage of the power relationship between them as a teacher or manager, and a student, invading their sexual dignity.

In hospitals and obstetrics. Violence against women occurs when women are mistreated, attacked, or violated during pregnancy, childbirth, or postpartum stages in public hospitals or clinics. Mistreatment can take the form of physical or psychological violence, causing various traumas to women. Violence can be expressed not just in the work of health professionals, but also in the structural failures of public or private clinics and hospitals that should provide dignity and protection to employees and patients. In many cases, violent behaviors are normalized and therefore are not reported, despite protections being guaranteed by law in many countries. Violence in obstetrics is characterized by abuse suffered by women during labor, delivery or postpartum, such as: verbal humiliation; disregard for their needs and/or pain; invasive practices such as unwarranted Cesarean sections; unnecessary use of medications or withholding of needed ones; dehumanization; negligence that robs mother and baby of the care necessary to guarantee the health of both; harsh treatment; or any procedure that causes pain, harm, or physical or psychological suffering.

In everyday life. It is important to consider the double, triple, or multiple vulnerabilities that some women may suffer. Women belonging to some groups, in addition to suffering discrimination for being women, can also be the object

of multiple forms of discrimination for other reasons, such as race, ethnic origin, religion, condition of disability, age, class, caste, sexual orientation, perceived sexual identity, or other factors. This discrimination can affect these groups of women to a different extent or in a different way than men. Therefore, the state's duties require ensuring suitable conditions and capacities to prevent institutional violence against these groups of women, by giving these risk factors appropriate consideration.

In cultural contexts. These are cultural practices that violate universal rights of women and girls (UNICEF, 2023; UN Population Fund, 2020; UN Women, 2018), such as:

Child or early marriage. A practice that affects the lives of mainly girls and adolescents in African and Asian countries. It refers to a social practice, whether formal or informal, of a union between a child or adolescent with another person, regardless of their age. In Mozambique in 2020, 41% of girls and 11% of boys under the age of 18 were married or lived with someone as if they were married (MGECAS & MISAU, 2020). For girls, marriage is often associated with early pregnancy, which causes higher rates of maternal mortality, and a life marked by domestic and sexual submission that makes them more vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS (UNICEF, 2023).

Infanticide. Another practice that affects the protection of life in Asian countries due to public reproductive policies and national cultures. The preference for a male child is a phenomenon present throughout the world, and generates 1.5% abortions of female fetuses per year. In 2016, China and India led the world list of deaths of female babies (Advisory Committee on Health Research, 2016). This practice is also linked to the increase in so-called “reproductive tourism,” which is carried out for the purpose of sex selection through in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and other technologies. In Thailand, where sex selection is not illegal; Chinese, Indian, and European citizens represent more than 70 to 80% of tourists who go to the country solely for practices to control the sex of a child. Female infanticide and the increasing number of males have disastrous consequences for humanity, and are causes of trafficking in women in Asia. Suhas Chakma, Director of Asian Centre for Human Rights, describes female infanticide as “the worst form of gender discrimination,” and urges the United Nations Human Rights Council to plan actions to eliminate the phenomenon (Agenzia Fides, 2016).

Learning Activity: Case Study Analysis

Objective: Students will explore how state violence, political violence, and surveillance practices intersect with gendered violence, particularly against women, transgender, gender-nonconforming individuals, and racial minorities. This activity will encourage students to understand how surveillance technologies and state practices contribute to the oppression of marginalized populations.

Case Study Analysis: Each group will be assigned a real-world case study in which institutional state violence, political violence, surveillance, and gender violence intersect. The goal of this activity is to understand how state-sanctioned surveillance contributes to the marginalization and violence experienced by women, transgender individuals, gender-nonconforming people, and racial minorities.

1. Choose one option per group
 - Criminalization of Reproductive Rights (examples: abortion bans, facial recognition software, and social media monitoring for abortion or reproductive care access, forced sterilization/“eugenics,” transgender reproductive healthcare bans, healthcare worker criminalization)
 - Transgender Surveillance (examples: facial recognition software for airports and federal property, biological sex sorting for prisons, anti-transgender legislation)
 - Surveillance of Migrant Women of Color (examples: border control and ICE detention violence, medical experimentation, child and family separation)
 - Intimate Partner Violence (examples: policing of IPV cases, societal response to IPV based on race, gender identity, and sexuality, child custody/child welfare)
2. Discuss these case study questions and form an analysis based on your findings:
 - How do state surveillance practices increase gender violence in your case study?
 - How does your case make evident the connections between social and political forms of gender violence?
 - How does your case study broaden your understanding of societal surveillance for this population group/issue?
3. Create a five-minute presentation about your case study findings to share with the class. Ensure that the connections between social, political, and state violence are highlighted for the issue or population group you investigated. Additionally, pay close attention to how gender surveillance factors affect the type of gender oppression you investigated.

Female genital mutilation (FGM). Also called clitoral mutilation, genital cutting, or (euphemistically) “female circumcision,” this refers to all procedures involving the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or any damage inflicted on the genitals for non-medical reasons (WHO, 2025). In 2023, more than 125 million women were mutilated in 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East, according to the World Health Organization, which condemns the practice as a violation of women’s human rights. For the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), this practice is the main manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination related to the historical suppression and subjugation of women, denying girls and women the full enjoyment of their rights and freedoms (Vasquez del Aguila, 2006).

Forced sterilization of women. The implementation of policies, often “eugenic,” that promote practices of forced sterilization of women, as a form of population and social control. They were applied in various countries during the 20th and 21st centuries—in the USA, Japan, Sweden, Germany, Peru, Brazil, and China—mainly to poor women from racial minorities. They are forms of institutional state violence, where public policies and medical practices combine to impose systematic violence and control over life, particularly that of women. During the Fujimori dictatorship in Peru (1990-2000), it is estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 Indigenous and peasant women from rural and impoverished areas of the country were sterilized (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024). This is a serious violation of the human rights of women and girls, which has long-lasting effects on the lives of those affected.

Misogynist policies. Institutional violence is also manifested through anti-gender and anti-feminist attitudes and messages, central to the agenda of authoritarian and conservative states (Gago, 2024). These policies and programs fight against issues such as gender and sexuality education, same-sex marriage, the expression of feminism as a social movement, and the rights of trans people, among other issues (hooks, 1984). This is a global phenomenon that has been rapidly expanding in the Western world in the first decades of the 21st century. This has happened in societies such as the United States (Trump administration, 2017-2022 and 2025-), Hungary (Viktor Orbán administration, 2010-present), Poland (Mateus Morawiecki administration, 2010-2023), Brazil (Bolsonaro administration, 2019-2022), Italy (Meloni administration, 2022-present) and Argentina (Milei administration, 2023-present). All of these societies have witnessed the rise of anti-gender and anti-feminist state policies, with regressive legislation that perpetuates social inequalities and injustices and institutional violence against women.

Public state institutions such as schools, hospitals, police stations, parliaments, and courts are expressions of everyday life that model normatively accepted patterns of social interactions. Institutional or state violence against women is not necessarily limited to the walls of institutional space.

Daily violence against women, which historically pervades social life, causes institutional gender violence to become “normal” and socially trivialized. It is a common practice to put the burden on women, individually, to deal with it. To name and de-normalize these oppressive relationships in societies in their multiple forms of organization, women are forced to challenge violence, make oppression visible, and expose what should *not* be accepted in democratic states of law.

Effective Practices from Institutions and Social Entities

When the state fails to hold perpetrators accountable, this impunity not only increases the subordination and powerlessness of women who are targets of violence, but also sends a message to society that male violence against women is acceptable and inevitable. In order to ensure that political and institutional violence against women does not go unpunished, states, international organizations, and social organizations have mobilized extensively in the first decades of the 21st century. Effective practices include monitoring strategies, legal advances, and digital initiatives on an international scale.

The United Nations General Assembly (2011) first called for zero tolerance for violence against women candidates and elected officials in *Resolution 66/130*. In 2012, Bolivia became the first country in the world to criminalize political violence and harassment against women. This development, which had repercussions across the region, led States Parties to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women to adopt a *Declaration on Political Violence and Harassment against Women* in 2015 (Organization of American States, 2015).

In 2016–2017, the National Democratic Institute launched the #NotTheCost campaign, accompanied by a toolkit to monitor violence against women in elections, help political parties address this issue, and document violent incidents against politically active women (National Democratic Institute, 2016). The Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) conducted the first global study on sexism, violence, and harassment against women parliamentarians; the Organization of American States (2017) published a model law to combat violence against women in political life; and UN Women, together with the United Nations Development Programme, launched a programming guide on preventing violence against women in elections (Ballington et al., 2017).



The 69th Commission on the Status of Women, dedicated to promoting gender equality worldwide

Despite these pioneering efforts, political violence against women online has become a problem of pandemic proportions. Recognizing this phenomenon, facilitated by ICTs (information and communications technologies), entities such as International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) have developed specific tools to stop VAWE online by capturing direct threats and abusive and violent rhetoric surrounding women's political participation (2017). ICTs facilitate content analysis of large volumes of social media data as well as the intensity, volume, and speed of violent cyberdiscourse, to stop hate speech and strengthen women's digital safety in elections. Implemented in multiple contexts around the world, including Ukraine, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, and the United States, the IFES tool stands out as a best practice with international reach, adaptable to contexts around the world. Effective practices in combating political violence against women require an integrated effort to ensure that local and global public policies and institutions are fairer and more inclusive from a gender perspective and respect the human rights of women and girls. Implementing these practices requires political and social commitment, as well as the active participation of civil society and social movements.

Some of the paths we suggest as intervention actions are:

- *Action:* Provide ongoing training in education and awareness-raising on Human Rights and Gender Equality for employees of state institutions, especially those working in the areas of health, education, and justice. Objective: To build an institutional culture that respects diversity and combats discrimination.
- *Action:* Promote public awareness campaigns on institutional state violence against women. Objective: To educate society about IVSAW, its impacts, and ways to combat it.
- *Action:* Promote legislative reforms that recognize and criminalize IVSAW. Objective: To expand the regulatory framework for this form of violence that provides for effective reporting and response mechanisms.
- *Action:* Review and reform policies and legislation that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion of women. Objective: To eliminate practices of forced sterilization and criminalization of motherhood, to guarantee equal access to health and education, and to protect women's reproductive and sexual rights.
- *Action:* Implement reparation policies for women victims of IVSAW. Objective: Restore the dignity of victims and prevent future violations.
- *Action:* Ensure that women victims of HIV/AIDS have easy access to justice. Objective: Include free and specialized legal assistance, sensitive to the needs of victims of gender violence and other forms of discrimination.
- *Action:* Ensure that all women and girls have access to quality sexual and reproductive health services. Objective: Include comprehensive sexuality education, family planning, and safe and legal abortion care.
- *Action:* Change the institutional culture that perpetuates violence and discrimination, promoting values of respect, equality, and dignity for all. Objective: Include training and professional development initiatives.

Summary

To build increasingly fair and effective democratic societies, some of the goals are increased gender/sexual, racial/ethnic, and class equality. The objective of political parity (equal representation) in current democracies is not achieved simply with quota laws or political-electoral parity (although this is of fundamental importance).

Consensus is developing that violence against women in politics is a serious threat to democracy, human rights, and gender equality around the world—it cannot simply be dismissed as “politics as usual” or the “normal cost” of political participation (Krook, 2020).

Overcoming political violence against women requires going much further than legal and institutional changes and, more broadly, ensuring that equal access for women and men to all state institutions and political organizations includes conditions free from discrimination and violence against women, trans women, and Black and Indigenous people at all levels and spaces of political life.

Review Questions

Which of the following are common types of violence against women in politics (VAWP) (select all that apply)?

- Interruptions of women speaking in political environments
- Casting doubt on women's abilities to perform their job functions
- Differential distribution of funding for female and male political agents
- Threats, humiliation, or blackmail of women political candidates



Common forms of institutional/state violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people include (select all that apply):

- Reproductive violence
- Sexual assault as a weapon of war
- Sexual harassment, illegal search, and sexual assault in prisons
- None of the above



Some of the effects of early marriage on girls include (select all that apply):

- Early pregnancy
- High maternal mortality
- High rates of STIs
- None of the above



Which of the following facets of identity intersect (overlap) with gender to differently affect women's experiences of gender violence?

 Race Socioeconomic status Sexual orientation Ability/disability

Which of the following are suggested actions to prevent political and institutional state violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people (select all that apply)?

 Provide ongoing gender equality training to employees of state institutions Review and reform policies and legislation that allow or require forced sterilization Implement policies of reparation to victims of institutional and state violence Transform institutional culture to promote values of respect, equality, and dignity for all

The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=271#h5p-5>

Answer key: 1. all of the above, 2. a., b., and c., 3. a., b., and c., 4. all of the above, 5. all of the above

Questions for Reflection

1. How does the state's role in promoting policies that impact bodily autonomy, the rights of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, as well as the criminalization of impoverished parents, contribute to gender violence? In what ways are state institutions—such as the prison-industrial complex, policing, child protective services, and immigration detention—complicit in perpetuating gender oppression? Discuss the intersection of state power and gender violence within these systems.
2. In what ways do institutional forms of violence differ from individual acts of violence, and why is it crucial to differentiate between the two in discussions of gendered violence?
3. How does violence against transgender people in political contexts undermine democratic principles and hinder progress toward gender equality?
4. Do you know what recourse(s) you have if you have been a victim of institutional violence?

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RURAL GENDER VIOLENCE

Laura Pallarés Ameneiro and Xosé M. Santos

Abstract

In this chapter about violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people in rural spaces, we first consider how the definition of a rural area differs among governments, NGOs, and other entities; complicating understanding of the issue and development of initiatives to resist violence. We then examine the extent of the problem of violence against women and other gender minorities in rural spaces and look at some of the specific forms of violence enacted against them. Finally, we review some programs and initiatives to end violence against rural women and consider what strategies and resources might still be needed.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will distinguish the vulnerabilities of rural women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people from those living in urban contexts, considering aspects such as the deficiency or remoteness of basic social services, the difficulties in accessing land ownership, and the lack of labor supply, among others
- Students will explain the importance of rural women in environmental conservation, food production, and rural development; and describe the negative impacts of violence against rural women on these activities
- Students will describe programs and other efforts to end gender violence against rural women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people

Many official reports, including those from the European Union, describe various forms of violence against women. However, the tendency to analyze them in a unidirectional way has often prevented us from distinguishing the different realities of women in various geographical territories and how they affect and aggravate gender violence. Rural women are vulnerable to intersectional discrimination, structural poverty, and social exclusion or precarious inclu-

sion. These factors are useful for understanding violence against women in its different forms. The territorial perspective is also valid and has been incorporated by international organizations (UN) to highlight the different expressions of violence against women in rural spaces in the Global North and South.

The first problem that arises when talking about violence against women in rural areas is to define the concept of “rural areas.” At a general level, it does not seem excessively complicated: areas characterized by low population density and an economy based mainly on agriculture and livestock. It is not at all easy, however, to set density thresholds for defining what is rural. These vary greatly from one country to another, ranging from a few hundred inhabitants to several thousand. In fact, it is common to classify rural areas simply as those that are “not urban,” which is evidence of their marginalization (since they are defined by exclusion).

International organizations such as the the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and the European Union have tried to define what is rural or urban, but it is difficult to reach a consensus due to the different socio-territorial realities (and thus, different definitions) of each country. The need to classify what is “rural” and what is “urban” led the OECD to establish three categories: predominantly urban, intermediate, and predominantly rural. The European Union created a new system based on a population density of 300 inhabitants per square kilometer. In the United States, the Center on Rural Innovation (CORI), points out that there are more than a dozen definitions of rural, although they opt for two of them; that of the Census and that of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (Center on Rural Innovation, 2022).

Sociology uses a qualitative rather than numerical perspective to define the rural space as the opposite of the urban one, defining it with characteristics such as a quieter life, more connection to nature, and where family and neighborhood relationships are much stronger: In short, a kind of refuge from modern city life. Urban dwellers may imagine a “Rural Idyll” (a kind of hypothetical utopian life) which has a long history in the West, although it re-emerges with greater force in times of crisis in urban society (Short, 2006). Bell (2006) points out that this rural idyll is a product of the bourgeois imagination that develops as a result of the processes of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization.

This idealized vision of the rural world, in harmony with nature, is a projection opposite to the city. This rural idyll transmits ethical and aesthetic values that connect with a disappearing world where our cultural roots reside. Gallent and Andersson (2007), in the case of England, point out that the perception of the landscape romanticizes the rural world to the point that the rural lifestyle becomes a characteristic of *Englishness*.

Therefore, defining what is rural or urban is not an easy task. We must even reject thinking about the two concepts as opposites, since there are vast transitional spaces in which rural and urban interact in a dynamic process of constant change and adaptation. Also, the social and territorial diversity that exists makes it difficult to compare the realities of many countries, such as India, Burkina Faso, or the United States. Nor should we forget that rural areas are often analyzed and interpreted from an urban rather than an integral perspective.

Even with these conceptual difficulties, we have no doubt that we live in an urban society. In quantitative terms, the United Nations reported that in 2007 the population living in cities exceeded the rural population for the first time in history, and since then the imbalance has become more pronounced. Although COVID-19 slowed down the urban-

ization process, the 56% of the population living in urbanized environments today will reach 68% by 2050, according to UN estimates (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2018).

But beyond purely quantitative data, what is certain is that, in general, cities set the social, cultural, and economic pace of the world. They are where political and economic power is concentrated, and from them come the social and cultural trends that define the contemporary world. In fact, the marginalization of the rural world is defined by a growing abandonment of these spaces, by the lack of public and private services, by the growing substitution of family agricultural production by large agricultural enterprises, or by an increasingly intensive use of rural-natural spaces to satisfy the needs of the urban population, from mining to tourist demand. This marginalization, which often makes institutions weak or absent, is relatively common in many rural areas, causing, for example, gender violence to be much more intense, although also more invisible.

Despite the decline of the rural population and the industrialization of agriculture, the rural world and small farmers are still responsible for a very important part of human and animal nutrition, as well as for the preservation of more sustainable production systems. In this context, the role of women is fundamental, as various reports have been highlighting for several decades now. The International Day of Rural Women has been celebrated, at the request of the UN, every October 15 since 2008 to recognize the decisive role of women in promoting agricultural and rural development, improving food security, and eradicating rural poverty.



ELMLEY CASTLE, WORCESTER.

Western conceptions of rural life may project it as idyllic, romantic, and easy

What is “Rural Development”?

Although the reality of rural development can be traced back to much of the 20th century, it was in the early 1970s that the World Bank formally introduced the concept to refer to “a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people—the rural poor.” At present, rural development policies are assumed by the major institutions responsible for global governance and by most countries. For the EU, it is one of the basic pillars of its agricultural policy. For the UN, it is essential to achieve the objectives of Sustainable Development, and means not only growth but also the incorporation of ideas linked to quality of life. However, it is a concept in continuous evolution and, in fact, the UN recently published a text in which it reflects on the need to reconsider rural development (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021).

Estimates by international organizations indicate that women are responsible for about half of world food production: even more so in developing countries, where this percentage is between 60 and 80%. Therefore, rural women

play a fundamental role not only in agriculture and food, but also in the conservation of agricultural systems and rural development. All this is in spite of the marginalized situations in which they live, the high levels of poverty, and the violence that further aggravates their living conditions.

Marginalization, Poverty, and Violence Against Rural Women

As has been made clear throughout the different chapters of this book, violence is a broad concept that is not limited to physical or psychological violence, but also includes other types of violence that are often more subtle and difficult to identify; but which also contribute to marginalization, impoverishment and, frequently, contempt for women's work. There are many reports produced by international or national organizations, both public and private, that ratify these ideas.

Rurality acts as an aggravating factor that significantly worsens the situation of women. This is because the global phenomenon of women's marginalization is compounded by specific circumstances that worsen inequalities and, consequently, the secondary and undervalued role of women in relation to men. At a general level, the World Health Organization (WHO) states that across their lifetime, one in three women, around 736 million, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence from a non-partner—a number that has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. These data are even more serious in the most impoverished countries; mainly in Africa, Andean America, and some regions of Asia, always coinciding with countries where the rural world has more weight (WHO, 2021).

But this is a problem that affects all countries, regardless of their level of development. For example, in Spain, official data from the Ministry of Equality, as well as from other organizations working in the field of violence against women, show that, in relative terms, rural women suffer much higher rates of violence than urban women and; in addition, take much longer to report situations of violence, an average of 20 years compared to less than nine years for urban women. In fact, the Attorney General's Office in Spain warns of the greater vulnerability of rural women to gender violence, and highlights the greater difficulty women have in accessing prevention and support services. Moreover, many rural municipalities cannot join the VioGén system, which monitors cases of gender violence, because they cannot meet certain requirements due to insufficient resources. Official statistics and reports on violence in Spain highlight not only the higher incidence of violence against rural women, but also the social, economic, and institutional conditions that increase the risk of suffering such violence. We are referring to the wage gap, job segregation, the great weight of role differences and the permanence of gender stereotypes, the difficulties in accessing farm management, and the weakness of public social services.

Learning Activity: IPV Resources in Rural Areas

Objective: Students will examine how rural locales often lack the social services resources required to support survivors of interpersonal and sexual violence adequately. This will encourage students to make connections between access to social services and the prevalence of IPV rates in rural locations.

1. Identify two rural locations in your home community (US or internationally) and examine what prevention organizations and social services exist for interpersonal or sexual violence survivors.
2. Use Google Maps to search what public transit options are available to each resource, and make sure to note the roundtrip distance from the town/city center to the available resource for public transit, walking, and driving distance. If there are no available resources in this town or city, use the “search this area” function to find the closest resource location. If nothing appears, zoom out and see if the next largest town or city has resources available. Make sure to note if the original location you chose does not have available resources for survivors.
3. Use <https://www.city-data.com/> to search the crime rates in the location you chose. You can filter these by the type of crime, so make sure to take note of any IPV or sexual violence crime.
4. Share your results with a classmate and compare notes about your chosen location. What inferences can you make about the crime rates vs. the available services in this location? How might a person experiencing IPV or sexual violence in this area go about accessing services? What barriers will exist for this person?

This situation of vulnerability, marginalization, and violence is reproduced with greater or lesser intensity in all countries; and progress, when it does occur, is usually too slow and not visible to the majority of the population. One example is that of the remote rural areas of northern Canada, where the situation of many women is critical, with rates of violence that far exceed the average for a country that is considered to be one of the most developed in the world. A report prepared in that country recognizes some elements that serve to explain this dramatic situation, including the permanence of traditional values and strong community ties, as well as physical and social isolation (Nonomura & Baker, 2021).

If we travel to the Global South, situations of violence against women in rural areas continue to be very intense. Numerous studies and official reports insist on their seriousness and prevalence despite the invisibility they face. In a study carried out some years ago in India, Sethuraman et al. (2006) highlighted the reality of violence against women and the consequences for their health and that of their children. One of the most striking aspects of their research

is their assertion that “in the rural communities, domestic violence was perceived as a normal daily occurrence that women felt they had to accept, and they felt that no one would become involved to stop the violence” (p. 134).

The situation becomes even worse if we consider the quality of the statistics. Palermo et al. (2014) title their article “Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender violence in Developing Countries.” After analyzing almost 300,000 data on women collected in 24 countries, they conclude that there is a very low level of reporting, on average seven percent, due to multiple factors such as embarrassment, the belief that reporting is not going to do any good, or that violence is part of normal life. Another of the results of this research indicates that it is in rural areas where there are a lower number of complaints compared to urban areas.

As we have just seen, the different studies carried out on gender violence in the rural world point to a series of factors that are very important for understanding the prevalence of violence in rural areas. One of these factors is geographical isolation, which is often accompanied by a lack of social services to support women not only in terms of care and support, but also in terms of prevention. A second factor is of a social and cultural nature. It is related to more traditional societies in which patriarchy is still very strong and where social control prevents many women from taking the step forward to overcome this situation of violence, which even they normalize.

A third factor is of an economic nature due to the greater dependence on men. In the Global North, the process of masculinization in rural areas is related to the lack of employment opportunities for women. The fact that they do not have their own income increases their vulnerability. According to a study by FAO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, women in rural areas are 14 to 34% less likely to own their own land than men; they are also more likely to have low paid, informal work, and 24% less income than their male counterparts. Their legal role is often reduced to farm support; which, among other things, prevents them from making decisions or accessing credit (2018). The protests in the agricultural sector that took place in Europe at the beginning of 2024 showed us images of demonstrations in which women were practically absent, with the tractor being the symbolic (and masculine) tool that best visualizes this overrepresentation of men in rural areas.

In a reflective document published by the Center for Development Research of the University of Bonn (Germany), it is pointed out that rural development is not possible as long as gender violence continues to be an endemic problem in the world (Beuchelt et al., 2022). In relation to the Global South, the document points out that gender violence in all its forms limits women’s capacity to make decisions, and reduces their access to projects and services that contribute to development; helping to perpetuate poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition. However, the text indicates that there are multiple approaches and strategies that have proven effective in the fight against gender violence; in particular, the most effective is to build strong feminist movements that give voice and visibility to rural women.

Strategic Documents and Rural Women

Many countries in the world have strategies to combat violence against women and girls or, more generally, documents that guide gender equality.

The importance of these texts lies in their *enforcement*, since they are often no more than declarations of intent that are not translated into policy implementation. Examples are countries such as the United States, Ireland, Japan, and Iraq. International organizations such as the UN, FAO, ECLAC, OECD, and the World Bank also have strategies that often set the stage for initiatives that will later be developed by many countries or support their policies.

Often, the fight against gender violence, much less against rural women, is not part of the priorities of many governments, so it is these international organizations that take on the challenge of raising awareness and designing specific measures for each country. Unfortunately, many of these documents barely consider the unique needs of rural women, although, when they do, it is always to acknowledge their greater vulnerability. One of the agencies working in the field of gender equality is USAID, which in June 2023 launched a brief entitled “Women’s Land & Property Rights and Economic Security,” in which it warned of the difficulties many women face in accessing land ownership and the consequences this has on gender violence, among other things.

Read some of the strategic documents on gender equality that some countries have approved and analyze, from a critical perspective, the importance they give to rural women. As examples, you can consult:

- UNFPA Iraq. (n.d.). *The national strategy to combat violence against women and girls 2018-2030*. https://iraq.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/the_national_strategy_to_combat_violence_against_women_and_girls_2018-2030.pdf
- Union Europea. (n.d.). *Plan de implementación Colombia: Compromiso europeo por el cierre de brechas de género y el empoderamiento de las mujeres y las niñas*. <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/Plan%20de%20Acción%20de%20Género.pdf>
- The White House. (n.d.). *National strategy on gender equity and equality*. <https://bidenwhite-house.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National-Strategy-on-Gender-Equity-and-Equality.pdf> (Archived content)

Violence Against LGBTQIA+ People in Rural Areas

If violence against women in rural spaces is still a very evident reality, violence perpetrated against LGBTQIA+ people is much more invisible. Although there are quite a few academic studies, there is very little official information. In general, it is understood that geographic isolation, a more traditional value system, and the lack of resources and support for the LGBTQIA+ community, make situations of violence worse than those found in urban areas, favoring a selective migration to the cities. However, although this is true, it is also true that the rural world is much more diverse than we might think.

The Movement Advancement Project (MAP) conducted a 2019 report on LGBT people in rural America, where they estimate that between 2.9 and 3.8 million LGBTQIA+ people are living. That report noted many of the issues these people face, especially if they are people of color, immigrants, or have a disability. The concepts of family, faith, and community that are at the core of rural life in America lead to situations of discrimination and violence. However, the report also points out the diversity of the rural world; and although it confirms the greater vulnerability of this group of people, including the public policies applied, it also states that this is not always the case and that there are communities that embrace LGBT people and their families and that “the complexity of public opinion in rural America illustrates that rural communities must not be written off as opposing equality for LGBT people” (executive summary, p. 8).

Several studies have tried to overcome this monolithic vision of the rural world as a hetero-patriarchal space. It is true that there is discrimination and violence, but diversity is also embraced and the LGBTQIA+ community has been able to find strategies to develop a full life in the countryside. These strategies are not limited only to creating their own communities, or using the tactic of equality—in which they highlight their role as farmers and minimize their queer identity. On the contrary, in some cases they reaffirm their queerness with great dignity, as Raj (2024) explains in his research on southern Portugal.

The issue of the migration of LGBTQIA+ people from rural areas to cities is defined in binary terms and is increasingly questioned; neither is the city a gay paradise, nor is the countryside a vacuum in which it is not possible to construct a non-hetero-normative gender identity. However, violence against LGBTQIA+ people is greater in rural areas. The Trevor Project’s *Research Brief* (2021) reveals that the situation of LGBTQ youth in rural areas is worse than in urban areas. In fact, of the young people interviewed in rural areas, 69% stated that their community was somewhat or very unaccepting of LGBTQ people, compared to 19% in large cities.

In its 2021 report, the National School Climate Survey, conducted in the United States by GLSEN, showed that 81.8% of the students surveyed felt unsafe at school, with the most hostile environment being in rural areas where, in addition, they have fewer resources to deal with this daily violence (Kosciw et al., 2022). Despite this serious situation, studies such as that of Wike et al. (2021) not only confirm the negative effects of cultural norms and lack of privacy in the rural world, but also point out that “youth are resourceful in finding and providing support for one another in their communities” (p. NP19009).

In the case of the European Union, there is no specific data on the rural world, but in its 2024 report, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights states that the percentage of those who felt discriminated against in some

area of their life in the last 12 months was 36% (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024). This represents a decrease from the 2019 report. However, the International Lesbian and Gay Association-Europe (ILGA), an umbrella advocacy group, notes a worrying increase in violence against LGBTQ+ people in Europe and Central Asia (2023).

Unfortunately, data on violence against LGBTQIA+ people living in rural areas in many parts of the world are almost non-existent. However, it is not difficult to assert that it must not be easy, given the general situation of LGBTQIA+ people in many countries around the world. A report by the Arcus Foundation (2019), on five African countries, some of them with very advanced legislation on LGBTQIA+ rights, emphasizes the lack of official data; although the data collected in their study show the seriousness of the problem in general, and the very scarce information on rural areas where neither NGOs nor social services reach.

Still a Long Way to Go

If inequality gaps between women and men have historically been generated and sustained, in rural areas this process has had deeper impacts that hinder the full development of women. Violence, discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion are dynamics that occur on a daily basis in rural and agrarian contexts; leaving women without access to their empowerment in social, political, economic, and cultural terms.

Discriminatory practices based on the use of stereotypes have the effect of undermining, restricting, or nullifying the ability of people, in this case rural women, to fully exercise and enjoy their rights. These ways of thinking and acting deny the principle of equality between people and make it possible to exercise different forms of violence (from harassment and physical abuse to symbolic and discursive violence) against women.

An example of these discriminatory practices is a recent study by the Spanish Federation of Rural Women's Associations (FADEMUR), which *characterizes the violence suffered in rural areas as invisible and socially normalized* (Delegación del Gobierno contra la Violencia de Género, 2020). The violence experienced by women in different areas has a structural background of exclusion, discrimination, and lack of access to better living conditions in general; hence, the importance of identifying, contextually and differentially, the structural relations of inequality that generate it, as well as the cultural and symbolic constructions that reinforce and express it.

An in-depth understanding of the ways in which violence against women is produced and reproduced in the rural world and its different typologies makes it possible to talk about institutional and economic violence. Numerous examples could be cited to make situations easily classified as violence visible. Increasingly, it has been stressed that the State can also be an agent that commits forms of institutionalized gender violence; not only because its agents carry out acts of physical, psychological, or sexual violence; but also because the State and its agents may fail in their responsibility to prevent, punish, and eradicate such violence against women. Institutional violence contains a moral dimension, as it objectifies and disregards individual people, presenting mainly a symbolic or administrative focus (Pereyra, 2015).

Thus, institutional violence includes not only those manifestations of violence against women in which the State is directly responsible for its action or omission, but also those acts that show a pattern of discrimination or an obstacle to the exercise and enjoyment of rights (Bodelón, 2014). Some authors speak of institutional violence as a synonym for structural violence, by exposing the violence exercised by institutions when they fail to fulfill their obligations to enforce citizens' rights. Johan Galtung (1969) prefers the term "structural violence" because it is more abstract, and violence is not always exercised by a particular institution; although he admits that the term "institutional violence" may be appropriate in certain contexts.

An example of institutional violence is the study on structural and institutional violence against rural Mixtec women, the case of the PROSPERA Social Inclusion Program in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, which articulates and coordinates the institutional offer of social policy programs and actions aimed at the population living in poverty (Torres Beltrán & Tena Guerrero, 2019). From the reading of this study, it can be observed based on the narratives of women's experiences, that the State, through PROSPERA, exercises structural violence ranging from the discourse of poverty to direct violence, perceived as "mistreatment," and exercised by those who carry out the program, which puts them in a situation of dependence and reproduces the role that has kept them in disadvantage, vulnerability, and inequality.

The case of Brazilian Mariana Ferrer, accusing businessman André de Camargo Aranha of sexual assault and rape, is another clear example of gender and institutional violence: the lack of ethics of those involved is evident, as they stopped judging the aggressor to judge the victim and her conduct (Accioly & Terra e Luanda Pires, 2020). This is an example of institutional violence practiced by public institutions that, through their agents, devalue women's rights. The judiciary should be an environment where victims are welcomed and listened to, not humiliated and discouraged from reporting.

Another typology of violence against rural women is economic violence, defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality as "any act or behavior which causes economic damage to a person (2017)." Economic violence against *women* emerges from the system of power relations between genders, and consists of harm or aggression to the economic survival of women (Ruano Duany, 2022). Economic violence manifests differently in certain contexts (cultural, social, and institutional), one of the clearest examples being limitations by institutions on women's access to employment or property rights (Arango, 2015).

A study conducted by FAO (2018) confirms that only 15% of landowners in the world are women. Despite the fact that nearly one in two farmers are women, women are much less likely than men to be the legal owners of the land they farm. Although technically 164 countries recognize women's right to own, use, and make decisions regarding land; in fact, social norms mean that these rights are accessible in [just 52 of these countries](#). Through numerous indicators, FAO (2018) concludes that women landowners are less likely than men to obtain a legal document proving ownership of their plots, or to have their names on the land ownership document.

Gender Violence, Rural Women, and Land Ownership

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was founded in 1948 to assess the state of the natural world and promote the necessary measures to safeguard it.

Aware of the importance of gender inequality and violence against women for sustainable development and climate change, the IUCN has also become involved in the struggle for equality, contributing numerous publications that demonstrate the causal relationships between gender violence, development issues, and climate change. Other environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace, have also become involved in this issue, as they understand its relevance for the achievement of their objectives.



Despite many countries' laws allowing women to own land, worldwide, women's land ownership is low

In one of its reports, IUCN addresses the issue of access to land ownership and links it to food security, poverty, and vulnerability; ownership being one of the fundamental aspects to consider in relation to violence against women in rural areas (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020). In many countries, women's right to land ownership does not exist or is very restricted, which is further evidence of economic and institutional violence. The World Bank points out that in MENA countries (the Middle East and North Africa), less than 50% have equal legislation regarding women's and men's access to land ownership, and only in Europe and Central Asia does it reach 100%; nevertheless, customary norms limiting women's access are often applied (Almodóvar-Reteguis, 2019). The Stand for Her Land campaign (Her Rights, Her Land, A Better Future for All) wants to put an end to this situation of violence.

To be even more aware of the difficulty of access to land ownership, you may want to study the case of several countries where land ownership is a reality for many women, not only in terms of legal aspects but also in terms of tradition. On the Land Portal (Land Portal, n.d.) website you can obtain a lot of information to analyze the situation of rural women in some countries in relation to access to land ownership.

Numerous examples worldwide clearly identify economic violence as one of the typologies experienced by rural women, primarily in access to land ownership. One such example is the recent study, “Breaking Patriarchal Succession Cycles: How Land Relations Influence Women’s Roles in Farming” (Sutherland et al., 2023) in Scotland. The analysis shows that women who grew up on farms and inherited were more likely to identify as farmers and engage in machine work, while women who gained access to farmland through marriage tended to engage more in housework and identify as farmers’ wives.

“Intergenerational Farm Succession: How Does Gender Fit?” (Sheridan et al., 2021), focuses on economic violence, especially in the Australian context, relating gender and farm inheritance patterns internationally, and identifying how gender norms continue to privilege sons and discourage daughters, and where farm inheritance is often based on an unfair distribution of assets between siblings.

Several recent studies and research confirm that, despite legal changes, women continue to encounter obstacles to inheriting farmland, as confirmed by an article referring to the fact that in the United States women still do not inherit farmland as often as their male relatives (Melotte, 2022). It confirms that girls and women are less likely than their brothers to take over farms.

We Must Continue to Move Forward

Regardless of the cases of gender violence against women in rural areas, in recent years there have been significant positive advances towards the prevention and cessation of violence through *socialization and education based on equality*, as well as the empowerment of rural women. Preventing violence and ensuring empowerment is not only critical to the well-being of individuals, families, and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given the large presence of women in the global agricultural labor force.



Patriarchal customs mean many women farmers will not profit from their own labors

One positive example is UN Women supporting rural women’s leadership and participation in shaping laws, strategies, policies, and programs on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security and rural livelihoods. Training equips these women with skills that enable them to access new livelihoods and adapt technology to their needs. UN Women works to end poverty through programs that provide training, loans, and practical skills to empower rural women, give them a voice, strengthen social services and raise awareness of women’s rights. UN Women also works to ensure women’s access to basic services, control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services.

Another example of positive progress is “A Comprehensive Approach to End Violence Against Women in Rural India” (UN Women, 2022). Jugnu Clubs, formed with UN Women’s support in several tea estates in Assam, are women’s empowerment groups that are helping to break the silence on violence against women and mobilize action for prevention, safety, and equality for all women and girls. As of January 2017, the clubs were formed as part of a comprehensive approach to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women and girls in the region, such as violence at home, at work, and in public spaces. With support from UN Women, women and men from rural communities in the Indian state of Assam have found new ways to work together to prevent and respond to violence against women, youth, and children in their neighborhoods.

Another example of the struggle for equality, prevention, and non-violence against women in rural areas, intensified by COVID-19, is the campaign to empower rural women in the face of the pandemic. “Rural women, women with rights” in Latin America, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, was organized because many of them face serious limitations in accessing productive resources, such as land, water, agricultural inputs, financing, insurance, or training; as well as barriers to placing their products in the markets. “Rural women, women with rights” seeks to increase the visibility of these women, disseminate information and proposals for solutions to the situation of rural women, eliminate gender violence, and promote solutions for food and nutritional security (2018).

In parallel, research by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) investing in rural people recognizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental to rural transformation, but that without addressing violence against women these development goals are not achievable (2019). Being free from any form of gender violence is a fundamental human right and an important requirement for food and nutrition security. In fact, violence reduces the well-being of rural women and can impair their ability to work, care for their families, and contribute to society. Violence affects all groups of women, but rural and Indigenous women are especially vulnerable. Many aspects of rural women's lives expose them to risks, such as fetching water and firewood from faraway places, or walking to and from markets after dark.

The fight comes through empowering rural women for gender equality. Empowering rural women economically can help reduce their vulnerability to abuse and strengthen their independence. Many IFAD-funded programs support women's livelihoods in small-scale agriculture, fisheries, livestock, and rural entrepreneurship. By enabling greater access to land, credit, and other productive resources, these initiatives accelerate the economic and social empowerment of rural women.

Another positive example of the fight against gender violence in the rural world is the consolidation of projects benefiting 95 rural women victims of gender violence in Argentina, aimed at strengthening productive units and supporting rural women victims of gender violence (Redacción Agrolink, 2021).

At the same time, progress has been made in terms of equality and empowerment of women in rural areas in other parts of the world, such as Peru. The Ministry of Agrarian Development and Irrigation (MIDRAGI), through its executing unit Agro Rural, is responsible for co-financing projects for rural enterprises run by women farmers in the highlands and jungle areas of Peru (Agro Rural, 2021). These projects promote the empowerment and productive development of women in rural areas to reduce poverty and increase the competitiveness and resilience of rural families through sustainable economic activities, with emphasis on family farming.

Summary

We have seen that violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people living in rural areas occurs in every country. Stereotypes about rural living and existing inequalities such as prevalence of rigid or traditional gender roles/normative heterosexuality combine with factors unique to rural areas—such as isolation, lack of access to social services, unequal access to land ownership and other forms of economic security, as well as a general acceptance of gender violence as “normal”—contribute to increased prevalence, and decreased visibility, of gender violence in rural areas. LGBTQIA+ people may face even greater risk and less visibility of violence, although this experience may be different in some places. Governments and NGOs around the world may be both perpetrators of institutional and personal violence against women *and* agents of support and change.

Numerous positive advances have been made worldwide in terms of equality and non-violence by different institutions/organizations that act for the empowerment of women. The struggle for their recognition has been going on for many years, taking into consideration that women’s human rights are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights. Through these advances, the importance of the full and integral participation of rural women as agents and beneficiaries in the development process is perceived, and especially the importance of eliminating violence against rural women in public and private life.

Review Questions

The "Rural Idyll" misrepresents the realities of rural life by (select all that apply):

- Spreading a romantic view of how women live in rural areas
- Projecting a belief that "rural" and "urban" are opposites
- Describing the countryside as unclean
- Allowing urban dwellers to ignore the effects of urbanization and industrialization on people in rural areas



Violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people in rural areas is exacerbated (worsened) by the following (select all that apply):

- Lack of access to social services
- Prevalence of rigid gender stereotypes
- Acceptance of gender violence as "normal"
- Economic dependence on men due to lack of independent income, ownership of land, and formal paid work



Strategic documents that aim to guide gender equality policies but may not have mechanisms to implement the policies include (select all that apply):

- The National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women and Girls 2018-2030 (Iraq)
- Plan de Implementación Colombia (Colombia)
- National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (USA)



Which of the following about violence against LGBTQIA+ people in rural areas is/are true?

- Violence against LGBTQ+ people is even less visible than violence against straight, cis women
- Violence against LGBTQ+ people increases if they also are persons of color, are immigrants, or have a disability
- Some rural communities welcome LGBTQ+ people and their families
- Violence against LGBTQ+ youth is more prevalent than violence against these youth in urban areas



Strategies to reduce violence against women in rural areas include (select all that apply)?

- Providing loans and training to increase women's economic independence
- Women's empowerment groups that speak against violence and take actions for safety and prevention
- Projects for women that promote sustainable agricultural activities



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=273#h5p-6>

Answer key: 1. a., b., and d., 2. all of the above, 3. all of the above, 4. all of the above, 5. all of the above,

Questions for Reflection

1. Reflect and debate on the mental idea that you have of the rural space, taking into account both the reality of your immediate surroundings and that of other countries. In these reflections think about the role of women: How do you imagine their work? What is the image of rural women conveyed by the media and, especially, by artistic creations, from painting to cinema? Look closely at some works by French artist Jean-François Millet, such as “The Gleaners” or “Harvesters Resting,” and analyze the female figures and compare with current photographs in countries of the Global South.
2. The subordinate role of women in the rural world has been reinforced in recent decades as a consequence of the technification of agriculture. Large machines and the use of highly innovative technology have reinforced the masculinization of the countryside, the emigration of women, and their subsidiary role on farms. Look for images of farmers’ demonstrations that have taken place, especially in Europe in early 2024, and reflect on the prominence of the tractor as a symbol of rural power and the presence (or absence) of women in these protests.
3. Despite the commitments made by various governments, many women and girls around the world are still unable to access quality, multi-sectoral services that are essential for their safety, protection, and recovery; especially for those who already suffer multiple forms of discrimination, and more specifically for women in rural settings, with much more pronounced forms of violence, discrimination, and exclusion. Therefore, it is important that each government put into action prevention and non-violence techniques. Seek information on the lack of prevention techniques for women victims of gender violence in the world, and more specifically for women living in rural areas.
4. Different institutions/organizations are currently working to show initiatives and resistance to violence in rural areas. An example is the Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW) project (n.d.), an organization that was created to respond to the silence of Kenyan society in addressing violence against women and girls. Analyze and reflect on the different initiatives undertaken by national and international organizations in different areas of the world, looking for the similarities and differences between them.
5. How might factors such as isolation, limited access to social services, job insecurity, and poverty increase the likelihood of experiencing gender violence?
6. How do traditional gender roles and expectations in rural areas influence the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV)? In what ways might these roles either perpetuate or challenge the cycle of violence, and what strategies could empower people to change these dynamics?

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COMBATING HUMAN TRAFFICKING THROUGH LEGAL FRAMEWORKS, ENFORCEMENT, AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, or receipt of people for exploitation (labor/sexual) by coercion, fraud, deceit, threat, abuse of power, or position of vulnerability. It is an internationally organized criminal phenomenon constituting abuse and violation of the fundamental human rights to life and dignity. Trafficking encompasses various forms, including sexual exploitation, labor trafficking, and less-discussed purposes such as begging, forced marriage, medical exploitation, entertainment, and sports. While each type of trafficking is distinct, it is yet interconnected, revealing the depth and complexity of the problem. Human trafficking is a transnational crime, driven by factors such as poverty, lack of opportunities, and demand for exploitative services. People from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic strata are particularly vulnerable to forced or bonded labor and sex trafficking.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of human trafficking in a global context, which includes a conceptual understanding of the issue, including various forms of human trafficking, recent trends, processes, and patterns functioning across borders. Trafficking is gendered: women and girls are disproportionately affected due to systemic inequalities, discrimination, and patriarchal norms, which significantly increase their risk of being trafficked. Challenges persist in combating trafficking and ensuring effective implementation and justice for victims.

The chapter also examines the numerous national and international law enforcement and legal frameworks established to combat human trafficking, issues of cooperation amongst stakeholders in the process of anti-human trafficking initiatives, and the importance of coordination among various agencies to combat trafficking effectively. It further highlights the necessity of comprehensive reforms and a gender-sensitive approach to address this multifaceted issue and uphold the rights and dignity of those affected.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will explain the elements of human trafficking
- Students will describe and distinguish the types of human trafficking, including human trafficking for sexual exploitation, labor trafficking and its major forms; and human trafficking for the purpose of begging, marriage, medical purposes, entertainment, and sports
- Students will identify the gender dimension of the problem
- Students will situate human trafficking in a global context
- Students will analyze law enforcement and legal frameworks related to human trafficking

The Problem of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has become a serious global issue of unforeseen proportions in the twenty-first century. This has prompted a rapid proliferation of international, regional, and national anti-trafficking laws, and inspired states to devote enormous financial and bureaucratic resources to its eradication. It affects every country in the world, irrespective of socioeconomic status, history, or political structure; and most countries have become a source, a transit (a place of passing through), or a destination for victims of this heinous crime, to one degree or another. The profits from human trafficking are apparently huge, and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime names human trafficking the fastest-growing and second-most profitable form of transnational crime (next to arms and drug smuggling), undertaken by highly organized criminals (Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, 2012).

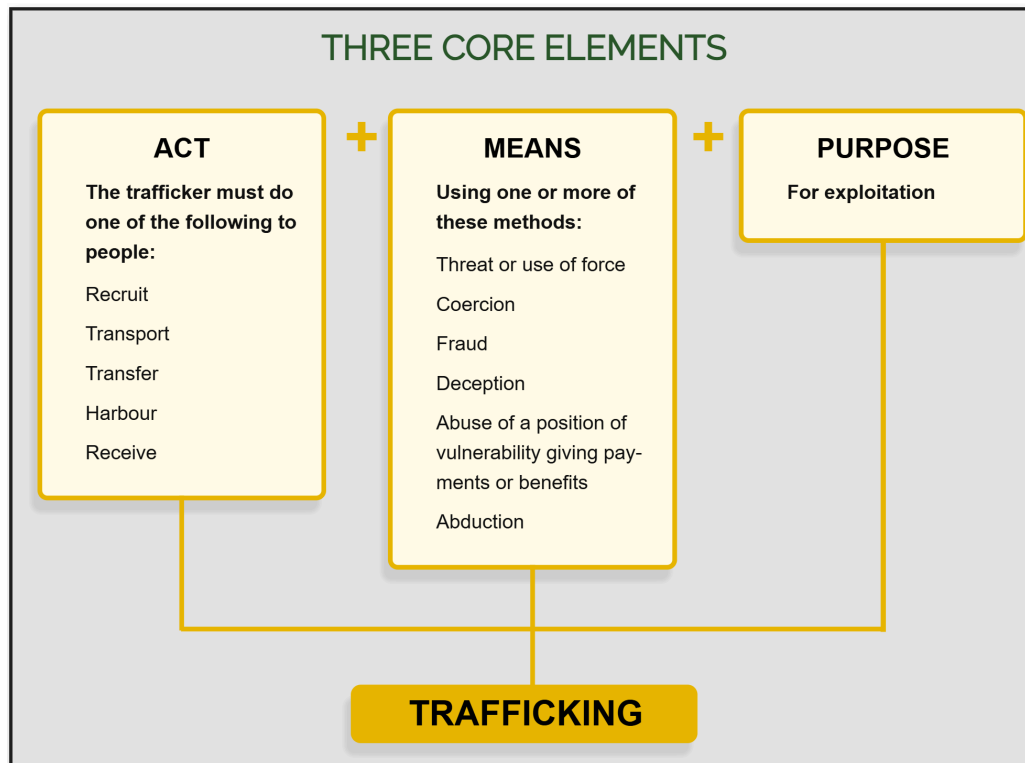
Human trafficking is an organized, heinous, and grievous criminal activity involving the exploitation of individuals through force, fraud, or coercion for purposes such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, or organ harvesting. Human trafficking is often described as a modern-day form of slavery and is a grave violation of human rights.

Recent Trends and Prevalence of Human Trafficking

Over the last decade, the volume of human trafficking has increased, though the exact numbers are not known. As a global phenomenon, the reasons for its increase are multiple and complex, affecting rich and poor countries alike. Although the popular perception of trafficking is the sexual exploitation of women and children, especially girls, children are trafficked for other reasons as well. Various social, economic, and political conditions create a situation of vulnerability, especially for women and children, who are trapped in trafficking.

The need for improved international responses to human trafficking and commitment to its eradication is illustrated by its prominent inclusion in the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN Office for Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) (Migration Data Portal, n.d.). Eradicating human trafficking is addressed specifically in SDG Targets 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2. The GCM's First Objective calls for collecting and utilizing accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies. Its 10th Objective calls for specific measures to prevent and combat trafficking in persons in the context of international migration (Migration Data Portal, 2024).

A recent study shows that cultural practices, climate changes, environmental issues, and poor governance have also increased the vulnerabilities that lead to this. Poverty, increasing trends of migration even within countries, and lack of economic opportunity are some of the major push factors (conditions driving people *out* of their home countries) for trafficking in women and children. The problems of commercial sex workers, urbanization and globalization, demand for cheap labor, and current trends of consumerism are some of the important pull factors (conditions bringing people *into* new locations). International communities, under the aegis of the United Nations (UN), constantly adopt conventions and protocols for the prevention and combating of human trafficking.



There are three core elements of trafficking

The International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative (CTDC) is the first global data hub on human trafficking, publishing harmonized (standardized) data from counter-trafficking organizations from around the world (n.d.). The CTDC dataset combines data from all CTDC data contributors (i.e., IOM, Polaris, RecollectiV, A21, and the Portuguese Observatory on Trafficking in Human Beings (OTSH)).

As per the *Trafficking in Persons Report* (US Department of State, 2019), there are 25 million adults and children suffering from labor and sex trafficking all over the world. In 77% of the cases, victims are trafficked within their own

countries of residence, rather than across borders. In 2020, the total number of victims of trafficking detected around the world by UNODC declined for the first time in 20 years, as the pandemic limited opportunities for trafficking and its detection. In addition, this decrease could be due to some forms of trafficking—such as for sexual exploitation—moving to more hidden spaces as public venues, where sexual exploitation often takes place, were closed (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

Learning Activity: Human Trafficking in the U.S.

Objective: Students will describe the prevalence of human trafficking in the United States and connect these findings to histories of domination and oppression in the U. S. Students will identify how human trafficking occurs and what state and federal efforts are undertaken to prevent it.

1. In groups, choose a state within the United States and view the human trafficking report for that state on this website: <https://traffickinginstitute.org/state-reports/>. Take note of how many prosecutions there were and what types of offenses were committed.
2. Identify factors that might influence the rate of trafficking in this state (e.g., poverty rates, immigration patterns, proximity to borders, tourism, or industry like agriculture or sex work).
3. Identify what approaches this state has taken to combat human trafficking. Does any state legislation exist? Are there any other prevention or protection systems in place?
4. Compile a short report and share it with the class.

In the macro scenario, globalization with its dark underbelly has significant consequences for the growing gravity and magnitude of the crime, swiftly outpacing efforts to combat it. Several factors facilitate the growth of this phenomenon: the globalization of the economy, the increased demand for personal services in the developed world, the continuing rise in unemployment among men and women, and the rapid and unregulated enticement and movement of human capital via the internet. The expansion in global transportation networks, the rise of low-cost airlines, and the freedom of movement between countries have further increased the pool of potential victims.

The persistence and apparent increase in human trafficking can be partly understood in terms of the modernization/development process, a context of rapid economic transition, globalization, modernization, employment trade, etc. Poverty/inability to meet basic needs, social exclusion, insecurity, and stigmatization are often identified as initial motivating factors. The vulnerabilities of females to trafficking are rooted in the socio-economic and cultural limitations on women's control of their life circumstances and choices, including sexual circumstances. Various legal provisions have been made to tackle the global menace of human trafficking, and more needs to be done to address the issue.

Definitions of Human Trafficking Have Evolved

Human trafficking is an organized crime. It involves trade and exploitation of children, women, and men. From an economic lens, human trafficking is a consequence of a commodification process that profits from human mobility. Every year, thousands of people fall into the hands of traffickers. (The distinction among human trafficking, “smuggling in persons” and “migration for work” depends on the extent of mediation (using someone as a go-between), the methods of traffickers, and forms of exploitation) (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2019).

The complexity of trafficking, the links with visceral issues such as commercial sex work and exploitation of children, and the politics of migration management have meant that there is much contention over the definition of trafficking and the types of policies and programming that would effectively combat it (Asian Development Bank, 2003).

The term “human trafficking,” until the 1990s, was defined in a very narrow way, and used interchangeably with “prostitution.” The most commonly used definition was:

[t]he illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national and international borders, largely, from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girl-children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations for the profit of recruiters, traffickers and crime syndicates as well as other legal activities related to trafficking, such as forced domestic labor, false marriages, clandestine employment and false adoption.

(United Nations General Assembly, 1995)

Concerns about the perceived rise of transnational organized crime and the plight of people living in slavery-like conditions gave rise to the United Nations (2000) *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*. The *Protocol* supplements the United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, signed in Palermo, Italy, in December 2000; which obliges states to criminalize human trafficking. The *Protocol* stipulates that the consent of a victim of human trafficking to the intended exploitation by the means set forth in the definition is irrelevant (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000). The United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* is the first legally binding instrument with an internationally recognized definition of human trafficking. This definition provides a vital tool for the identification of victims, whether women, children, or men; and for the detection of all forms of exploitation which constitute human trafficking:

Trafficking in persons is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power or subtle inducements that take advantage of an individual's vulnerability or the use of force or violence for the purpose of exploitation like prostitution, servitude, forced labor or services including begging, trade in organs, marriage, adoption, and child soldiers.

(UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000)

The United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, was adopted in November 2000, and is now the internationally agreed-upon definition of trafficking. Article 3(a) of this protocol defines “trafficking in persons” as:

[t]he recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or subtle inducements that take advantage of a person's position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (2000)

This protocol has been adopted by the United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (UNTOC), which is committed to promoting cooperation to prevent and combat transnational crime. This emphasizes the organized nature of human trafficking (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000).

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), defines “severe forms of trafficking in persons” as:

- *Sex trafficking*: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; (and)
- *Labor trafficking*: the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Major Forms of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking includes several types for a variety of purposes:

Sex trafficking is human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation (CSE), such as in brothels, sex tourism, pornography, child marriage, “massage parlors,” “call girls” (both in person and virtual), and other activities.

Labor trafficking involves trafficking for labor (work), and can include bonded labor, domestic work, agricultural labor, construction work, in industries, work in the formal and informal economy, including labor exploitation in: agriculture and fishing; domestic work; construction, mining, quarrying and brick kilns; manufacturing, processing and packaging; market trading and illegal activities; begging; child labor, especially in catering, garment, and carpet industries.

Organ trafficking is when people are trafficked so that their organs can be sold to be used as transplants. Trafficking for other illegal activities may include betting, drug peddling, and smuggling.

Other forms of trafficking have emerged in recent years; such as bride trafficking, infant trafficking, trafficking for breastfeeding, trafficking for sperm donation, trafficking for skin grafting, etc. *None of the forms of trafficking are mutually exclusive and one form may overlap with another form.* People can be trafficked by many means; such as physical force, or false promises made by traffickers, lure for better opportunities in life, etc. (Tata Institute of Social Sciences, 2019).

The *Trafficking in Persons Report* categorized trafficking as: forced labor, bonded labor, debt bondage among migrant laborers, involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labor, child soldiers, sex trafficking, child sex trafficking and related abuses, commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), and child sex tourism (CST) (US Department of State, 2009).

The Global Slavery Index

A report by the Walk Free Foundation (n.d.), The [Global Slavery Index 2023](#), highlights the increasing prevalence of modern slavery worldwide, with the number of people living in such conditions reaching 50 million—an alarming 25% rise in the past five years.

This means that one in every 160 people in the world is a victim of modern slavery. The index ranks 160 countries based on their estimated prevalence of modern slavery per 1,000 people. The countries with the highest prevalence are North Korea (104.6), Eritrea (90.3), and Mauritania (32.0), where modern slavery is widespread and often state sponsored. The countries with the lowest prevalence are Switzerland (0.5), Norway (0.5), and Germany (0.6), where strong governance and effective responses to modern slavery are evident. (For comparison, India has a prevalence of 8.0 people per thousand, and the US 3.3 per thousand.) Asia and the Pacific have the largest overall number of people in modern slavery (29.3 million).

Processes and Patterns of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is increasingly recognized as a complex process, and the factors that make an individual vulnerable to being trafficked are multifaceted. It involves a series of episodes for the trafficked person, which might start with the desire or need to leave their home/community or migrate, followed by an encounter with a trafficker, leading to coercion or deception and highly harmful and exploitative working situations. For others, it might start with family members handing over responsibility for their safety and well-being to others known to them, and then ending up being trafficked by a third set of actors. Desperate circumstances often lead migrants to make difficult decisions and lead them into situations of great risk and vulnerability.



Programs that empower migrants and refugees can combat human trafficking

Traffickers throughout South Asia lure their victims by offering attractive promises such as high-paying jobs, glamorous employment options, prosperity, and fraudulent marriages (Report of South Asia Workshop, 1996).

Poor households in debt or struggling with insecure livelihoods may be compelled to hand over a person or may agree to migrate legally or illegally or take a job willingly. But once that work or service is no longer voluntary, that person becomes a victim of forced labor or forced prostitution and should accordingly receive the protections of the 2000 UN TIP Protocol.

The nationalities of trafficked people are as diverse as the world's cultures. Some leave developing countries seeking to improve their lives through low-skilled jobs in more prosperous countries. Some families give children to adults, often relatives, who promise education and opportunity, but instead sell the children into exploitative situations for money. Fraudulent recruiters, employers, and corrupt officials take advantage of these people to reap profits from others' desperation. Parents and family members are also taken in by false promises and other deceptions. However, studies confirm that victims' family members and relatives also collude with traffickers in order to receive payments (US Department of State, 2009). In several areas, this is seen as a viable strategy for poor families, and therefore they do not support prosecution nor acknowledge the level of harm caused to victims or the community.

Push Factors

The most commonly identified push factor driving the trafficking process is poverty. Lack of human and social resources, gender discrimination, social exclusion, lack of governance, deprivation, marginalization, and vulnerability may also make people more susceptible to trafficking. Macro factors such as the impact of globalization, employment trade, migration policy conflicts, and environmental disasters can set into motion circumstances that increase vulnerabilities.

The global financial crisis has raised the specter of increased human trafficking around the world. As a result of the crisis, two concurrent trends—a shrinking global demand for labor and a growing supply of workers willing to take ever greater risks for economic opportunities—seem a recipe for increased forced labor cases of migrant workers and women in prostitution.

The Gender Dimensions of the Problem

“Women still comprise the majority of the world’s poor, unfed, and unschooled. They are still subjected to rape as a tactic of war and exploited by traffickers globally in a billion-dollar criminal business.”

*—Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, March 7, 2009
Trafficking in Persons Report (US Department of State, 2009)*

Changes such as widening social and economic inequality, rural unemployment, and increased poverty, new forms of mobility, breakup of communities, and erosion of traditional values are increasing the vulnerability of a large segment of the population to trafficking, particularly women and girls. Women constitute the poorest of the poor as a result of gender insensitivity, discrimination, lack of social status and basic rights, together with arduous domestic responsibilities; which reduce their access to resources, education, training, and labor markets. Within families, women, particularly girl children, generally have less access to food and health care as well as to educational opportunities. Anti-female biases are reflected in the fact that South Asia is one of the few regions in the world where men outnumber women.

Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking Intersect

Trafficking occurs in a climate of denial and silence at all levels. There is prevailing silence about violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, and silence about their circumstances, including the abuse and exploitation they often face in their living and working environments in the process of earning a living. This silence manifests itself as denial in families, communities, and society at large, that trafficking of girls is taking place.

Research has shown a clear link between sex trafficking and both pre-trafficking domestic violence and trafficking-related gender violence. In this context of discrimination, lack of choice and vulnerability, increasing numbers of young women and girls, many between the ages of 10 and 20, are being trafficked in South Asia, mainly for the sex

industry. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women observed that while the failure of states to protect and promote women’s human, economic, and social rights has created a situation in which trafficking flourishes, it further subjects women to numerous additional human rights violations (Asian Development Bank, 2023). Girls and women who are trafficked are deprived of their freedom, security, and dignity as human beings, and are endangered by violence and illness, including HIV, from sexual exploitation and abuse.

The low status of women, insufficient access to education, limitations on legal rights, and other forms of discrimination are recognized as push factors that combine with situational problems such as conflict, civil instability, or an economic crisis to prompt young women to leave their communities. Violence against women is all too common, and laws intended to protect women are inadequate or not enforced. In addition to physical attacks and injuries, women who are victims of spouse or intimate partner abuse are often subjected by the abuser to constant berating, severe psychological abuse, and excessive levels of control over nearly every aspect of daily life.

Research links the disproportionate demand for female trafficking victims to the growth of certain “feminized” economic sectors (commercial sex, the “bride trade,” domestic service) and other sectors characterized by low wages, hazardous conditions, and an absence of collective bargaining mechanisms. Exploitative employers prefer to use trafficked women—traditionally seen as submissive, cheap, and pliable—for simple and repetitive tasks in agriculture, food processing, labor-intensive manufacturing, and domestic servitude. Since commercial sex is illegal in most countries, traffickers use the resulting illegal status of migrant women who have been trafficked into commercial sex to threaten or coerce them against leaving the situation. Gendered vulnerabilities fostered by, for example, discriminatory laws and practices that tie a woman’s legal recognition, property rights, and economic opportunities to a male guardian who controls her income, identification, citizenship, and physical well-being is more susceptible to becoming a trafficking victim (US Department of State, 2009).

Reasons for Leaving Home

The root causes of migration and trafficking greatly overlap. The lack of rights afforded to women serves as the primary causative factor at the root of both women’s migrations and trafficking in women. . . . By failure to protect and promote women’s civil, political, economic and social rights, governments create situations in which trafficking flourishes.

—Radhika Coomaraswamy, former UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women (as cited in US Department of State, 2009)

Trafficking in women results both from social inequality and susceptibility to exploitation. The feminization of poverty leads women to look for any work and ways to improve their material well-being in spite of possible negative consequences.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the majority of people trafficked for sexual exploitation or subjected to forced labor are female. According to researchers, both the supply and demand sides of the trade in

human beings are fed by “gendered” vulnerabilities: women often have no individual protection or recognition under the law, inadequate access to healthcare and education, poor employment prospects, little opportunity to own property, and/or high levels of social isolation (2020).

Specific reasons women and girls may leave home include:

- Being lured with promises of jobs in the city, or by pledges of marriage
- Being sent by families to earn extra income for the household
- Escaping from domestic abuse and violence
- Looking for a better life and wider opportunities away from the rural drudgery and the narrow limitations imposed on women and girls in villages
- Being made vulnerable by lack of education, knowledge of the world, and life skills
- Trusting people who dupe them and subsequently sell them, generally into sex work. (In many cases, a trafficker is a person they know or a person known to others in the source areas)

At the same time, the socio-cultural climate of the region fosters a high sense of duty in women towards their children, younger siblings, and older parents. It is not unusual to find women who resort to lower-end jobs and sexual labor to support their families and to pay for the education of male family members. If they are trafficked and end up in the worst forms of commercial sexual exploitation, the majority continue to bear it and do not protest or break away.

Rural Gender Violence

Rural women experience higher rates of IPV (interpersonal violence), face unique challenges and greater frequency and severity of physical abuse, yet live much further away from available resources. Important factors contribute to their heightened risk and limited access to resources, such as:

- Geographical isolation
- Limited economic opportunities
- Social norms and stigma
- Lack of awareness and education
- Cultural barriers
- Fewer support services and resources
- Long journeys to access shelters, counselling services, or legal assistance, making it more difficult for them to seek help or escape abusive situations

These economic and social factors drive women in rural areas to seek opportunities in urban areas for a better quality of life. Lack of proper documentation can increase this vulnerability, as traffickers exploit this desperation and lack of legal protections. In many cases, this leads to migrant smuggling and associated human trafficking (ATrain Education, 2025; Peek-Asa et al., 2011).

Commodification of Women

Violations of universal human rights of women resulting from their use as commodities (merchandise) of trafficking take place in countries from which they are exported as well as countries into which they are imported. When women and young girls have little control over their daily lives and occupy a subordinate status, it is extremely difficult for them to negotiate for safe sex, even if they know about the need for it. Women and girls are biologically more susceptible to HIV infection if exposed to the virus, and are placed at greater risk of exposure because of the attitudes and sexual behavior of men within societal structures that directly and indirectly discriminate against women and in favor of men.

Discrimination against women is also associated with psychological violence and emotional deprivation. Existing male bias in South Asia, including the preference for a male child, means that young women and girls may, from birth, be deprived of the love and affection of family members. They are often abused, sexually and otherwise, and made to bear the brunt of household work. A show of affection and understanding even from a stranger therefore elicits an eager response and easily leads to bonding and immediate trust building. This is easily exploited both by local and professional traffickers, who pose as lovers and thus lure young women and girl children into the trafficking net (STOP, 2001).

Case Studies/Reports from India

Statistics about the types and prevalence of human trafficking can be illuminating and useful in considering ways to prevent and respond to it.

Looking at specific case studies will also help put human faces to the phenomenon.

Chilakaluripete, Andhra Pradesh

Many remote villages in Andhra Pradesh, ridden by drought and famine, to survive hunger and poverty, are reduced to selling their daughters to recruiting agents. The women were bought from their parents when they were infants and sold into the trade. They lived in brothel houses for a few years before being auctioned as sex workers. One of them tried escaping once and was forcibly brought back and kept in a dark room for many days, before going back to the trade.

Many women in this village were brought here by their fathers, brothers, friends, husbands, or agents. Sold into the trade for meager amounts, they live their life in these brothels in difficult circumstances.

Tiruppur

Tiruppur is a city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, famous for its large cluster of firms producing cotton knitwear. It accounts for nearly 80% of the country's cotton knitwear exports and has generated employment for over 300,000 people from across the country. Cheap labor is always in demand here.

In 2023, a group of 10 girls from the Northeastern state of Manipur were rescued from one of the factories. Young girls from financially needy families in Manipur, who were in dire need of jobs and were seeking employment through agencies, were shortlisted by agents posing as employment agency reps. An agent spotted the probable candidates, shortlisted them, offered them jobs, and after due training in tailoring units in Manipur itself, transferred all the girls to Tiruppur. After entering the factory premises, for almost two weeks, their mobile phones were taken away, they were confined to constricted living spaces, and were provided only two meals per day. Suspecting foul play, while the parents of the girls were trying to get in touch with their children, the girls tried to speak to the other resident workers to get more information. Soon they realized that they were trapped, and were in the clutches of people who could even sell them for sex work, which is quite rampant in the area.

One night, with the help of one of the senior workers, they contacted the parents at Manipur, who in turn contacted known people, to start a rescue mission. Upon hearing about the plight of these 15 girls, one Manipuri student reached the factory in the middle of the night and raised a hue and

cry with the security guards at the factory. Under threat of calling the police and the parents of the girls holding the agent's family hostage in Manipur, the agent at Tiruppur released the 15 girls, who were then sent to their homes.

This is one of the rare cases where women have been rescued from such institutions. Usually, once the women get stuck in such places, they either work under poor conditions for paltry amounts or even worse, get sold into sex work.

For further learning, explore one or more of the resources below:

- *10 case studies in human trafficking*. Migrant Rights. (2018, February 28). <https://gijn.org/resource/10-case-studies-in-human-trafficking/>
- *39 Nepali girls rescued in human trafficking case*. NewsBytes. (n.d.). <https://www.newsbyte-sapp.com/news/india/delhi-39-nepali-girls-rescued-in-human-trafficking-case/story>
- Discussion on United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2023, February 1). *Global report of trafficking in persons, 2022*. Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFQatB7cuUY>

Impact of Trafficking on the Victims

Trafficked individuals encounter a wide range of psychological, emotional, and health conditions as a result of their traumatic experiences (International Dialogue on Migration, 2004). Victims undergo undeniable stress during their movement from one location to another, after reaching the destination, and for a long time after reaching the destination.

The causes and effects of human trafficking

<i>Causes</i>	<i>Impacts</i>
Poverty and economic disparities	Trauma and psychological effects
Lack of education and awareness	Physical health complications
Conflict, instability, and displacement	Loss of freedom and rights
Social marginalization and discrimination	Social stigma and isolation
Demand for cheap labor and services	Global consequences
Online exploitation and technology	

During Travel and Transit

Moving victims from one place to another entails extreme stress, and the living conditions of the victims can vary depending on factors such as the type of trafficking, region/country where trafficking occurs, specific circumstances of the victim, and effectiveness of the anti-trafficking efforts in the area. The victims undergo living conditions which are:

- *Exploitative*: Victims of trafficking are often forced into exploitative services like forced labor in factories, farms, mines, construction sites, or domestic servitude, where they may have to work long hours under hazardous conditions without adequate pay or breaks.
- *Abusive*: People who are trafficked frequently endure physical and psychological abuse including violence, verbal abuse, rape, and threats which can lead to physical injuries, mental health issues, and trauma. They are usually isolated from family and support systems with restricted communication, to enable control.
- *Unhealthy*: Owing to the very nature of the crime, the victims are usually transported in very unhealthy conditions. The individuals may be exposed to dangerous modes of transportation and high-risk border crossings. They are housed in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions without access to basic amenities like clean water, food, or healthcare. They are forced to live in cramped and unhygienic conditions, which can lead to physical ailments like urinary tract infections.
- *In debt bondage*: This is a method of control exercised by the traffickers where the victims are forced to work to repay a debt that is impossible to pay off, calculated by fraudulent accounting, imposing extremely high rates of interest.
- *With limited access to assistance*: Trafficking victims usually don't have legal documents, and the few available documents are confiscated by the traffickers, which leaves them vulnerable to arrest, deportation, and further exploitation. Sadly, they also lack knowledge about and don't have access to support authorities, which leaves them in the clutches of the traffickers.

Destination Stage

- *PTSD*: Most trafficked people suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder due to the severe and prolonged stress they endured, which might include physical/sexual abuse, confinement, and coercion. Besides PTSD, victims have been known to undergo a myriad of other physical, social, psychological, and emotional issues.
- *Substance abuse*: Victims of trafficking are often forced into substance use which later develops into addiction. Alcohol and drugs are made accessible to keep the victims in a pliable state of mind and ensure that they follow instructions.
- *Physical health issues*: Due to the unhealthy conditions of movement, transport, and living during trafficking, many victims develop health issues. Cramped spaces and unhygienic conditions lead to infections and other illnesses. The lack of sleep, space, security, and food leads to a lifetime of psychological issues.
- *Sexual and reproductive health*: Being transported across distances in menial conditions, often the victims are

subjected to physical abuse and rape, as a result of which many of them face issues like uterine infections, STDs, unwanted pregnancies, and sometimes coerced/repeated abortions, leading to a life of unhealthy reproductive issues.

- *Social stigma:* Victims of trafficking face an inordinate amount of social stigma and discrimination in society. They don't find support and rehabilitation services easily, and if they do reach out, they are sometimes met with lukewarm or negative responses; owing to which the victims may tend not to seek out legal or social support assistance.
- *Financial instability:* Victims of trafficking try to escape from their circumstances despite of lack of legal documents and fear of exploitation, owing to the dire circumstances surrounding their lives. When they finally reach the destination, they may find that it is unlike what was earlier promised and that they are trapped, at the mercy of the traffickers and agents. They often receive little or no wages even after working long hours, and are forced to work continuously for extended periods with limited financial resources to pay off their debt bondage.

Trafficking has a negative impact on the lives of all victims, but it affects women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in distinct and disproportionate ways, reflecting underlying inequalities, discrimination, and vulnerabilities based on gender, age, and sexual orientation (Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons, 2017).

Women

- *Physical harm:* Trafficked women and girls often endure extended periods of physical violence, including beatings, sexual assault, and torture; which can result in serious injuries and STIs. Many suffer from unwanted pregnancies, and repeated/forced abortions leading to long-term effects on reproductive health.
- *Psychological trauma:* The trauma of trafficking can lead to a range of psychological issues, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and dissociative disorders.
- *Social stigma:* Trafficked women and girls face severe social stigma and discrimination, which hinders their ability to seek help, seek assistance from support services, as well as in the rehabilitation process. After undergoing sexual abuse and working as sex workers or acting in porn videos for some time, most women and girls refuse to go back to their homes, fearing recognition and stigma.
- *Isolation:* Trafficked women and girls find it nearly impossible to reintegrate into society, as the process of trafficking hinders their education and economic stability.

LGBTQIA+ Individuals

- Many LGBTQIA+ individuals are targeted, especially if they are homeless, runaway, or rejected by families. They find reduced support systems and may be reluctant to seek support, fearing further discrimination or mistreatment.
- LGBTQIA+ individuals face higher levels of social and economic marginalization and discrimination, making

them more vulnerable to trafficking.

- During trafficking, LGBTQIA+ persons go through extreme abuse and sexual exploitation, which also leads to severe physical injuries, psychological trauma, and long-term emotional scars.
- Experiences of isolation and stigma, before, during, and after trafficking, make them hesitant to seek support, fearing repeated stigma and rejection.
- LGBTQIA+ individuals need specific and specialized assistance from people who are trained to identify and respond in an empathetic manner. Our system lacks these sensitivities, and LGBTQIA+ members go through further trauma.

Cooperation Among Stakeholders in the Process of Anti-human Trafficking

The impacts of human trafficking may be dominant, visible, perceived, or otherwise, but its ramifications permeate deep into society. Fighting against human trafficking is a crucial task that calls for a united effort from various stakeholders, including the victims, families of victims, medical professionals, rehabilitation officers and support officials, governments, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, and citizens alike. This can be furthered by:

- *Raising awareness:* Educating citizens about the issue of human trafficking by sharing information on social media, organizing awareness campaigns, or hosting events to spread awareness in the community.
- *Supporting anti-trafficking organizations:* Making donations to or volunteering with organizations that work to combat human trafficking. Encouraging work with organizations that provide essential services such as victim support, advocacy, and prevention programs. Examples: A non-government organization, [Prerana](#), (India), works against trafficking and encourages volunteering and public involvement to fight human trafficking. Another organization, [CRY](#) (Child Rights and You) has been working against child trafficking by connecting with the government to rescue victims, organizing awareness rallies, rehabilitating trafficked/rescued victims, and connecting with parents to provide job opportunities to ease financial pressure.
- *Advocating for policy change:* Advocating for stronger laws and policies to prevent human trafficking and protect victims. Writing to elected officials, participating in advocacy campaigns, and supporting legislation aimed at addressing trafficking. Example: [Freedom Network USA](#).
- *Reporting suspected cases:* Reporting suspected victims of trafficking to the authorities, which can help rescue victims and bring traffickers to justice. Most countries have hotlines and helplines dedicated to receiving reports of trafficking. Example: [Blue Campaign](#).
- *Supporting ethical practices:* Being mindful of products bought and services used. Supporting businesses and companies that have transparent and ethical supply chains and do not engage in exploitative labor practices. Example: The [Worker Rights Consortium](#) conducts independent investigations to ensure ethical practices in factories and manufacturing units.
- *Empowering vulnerable communities:* Supporting programs and initiatives that empower vulnerable popula-

tions, such as at-risk youth, the LGBTQIA+ community, migrants, and refugees, with education, job skills, and economic opportunities. Example: [Human Trafficking Task Force E-Guide](#).

- *Educating others:* Engaging in conversations with friends, family, and colleagues about human trafficking helps dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding the issue and encourages the public to join the fight against trafficking. Example: [Polaris Project](#) works towards educating people and removing myths about trafficking.
- *Staying informed:* Staying informed about current trends and developments in the field of human trafficking. Following reputable news sources, research reports, and academic studies to deepen your understanding of the issue and identify new ways to contribute to the fight against trafficking.



Training and inter-agency cooperation can increase the effectiveness of law enforcement against trafficking

- *Prevention:* Preventing human trafficking needs a comprehensive approach addressing the underlying social factors that contribute to trafficking, such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, and lack of opportunities. This will further need policies and programs that promote economic development, social inclusion, and social equality (US Drug Enforcement Administration, n.d.).
- *Support:* Supporting survivors of trafficking through free immigration and legal assistance (The Advocates for Human Rights, n.d.)
- *Legal framework:* International and national laws exist to combat human trafficking and provide protection to victims. The United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol is the primary international legal instrument addressing human trafficking, while many countries have enacted legislation criminalizing trafficking and establishing mechanisms for victim support and prevention (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2000).

Law Enforcement and Legal Frameworks

The legal frameworks and law enforcement efforts guiding human trafficking vary from country to country, but several international conventions and protocols provide a framework for combating human trafficking globally. Key conventions include:

International Conventions and Protocols

- The United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (commonly known as the Palermo Protocol) is a crucial instrument in addressing human trafficking globally (2000).
- The United Nations *Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (UNTOC) supplements the Palermo

Protocol by providing a comprehensive legal framework to combat various forms of organized crime, including trafficking in persons (2000).

- International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions: The ILO has several conventions addressing forced labor and trafficking, such as Convention No. 29 on Forced Labour (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1930) and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (International Labour Organization, n.d.; 2020).

National Legislation

Most countries enact laws specifically targeting human trafficking. These laws define trafficking offences, prescribe penalties for perpetrators, and establish mechanisms for victim protection and assistance. Examples:

- [*The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act \(United States\), Pub. L. No. 106-368, 114 Stat. 1464 \(2000\).*](#)
- [*The Human Trafficking and Exploitation \(Scotland\) Act 2015 asp 12.*](#)

Legislation may also address related offences such as forced labor, slavery, sexual exploitation, and the smuggling of migrants (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

Law Enforcement Efforts

Taking into account the pivotal role played by law enforcement agencies in investigating cases, apprehending traffickers, and dismantling trafficking networks, countries implement law enforcement strategies to combat trafficking at various levels.

- Law enforcement agencies are tasked with investigating and prosecuting cases of human trafficking. This involves collaboration between local, national, and sometimes international law enforcement entities.
- Specialized units or task forces may be established to focus specifically on combating human trafficking.
- Training programs for law enforcement officers are essential to ensure they are equipped to identify and respond to cases of trafficking effectively (International Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.).
- Many countries develop national action plans to coordinate efforts across various sectors to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute traffickers. These plans often involve collaboration among government agencies, law enforcement, civil society organizations, and international partners. Examples: *National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery 2015-2019* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014), *Human Trafficking* (Government of India Ministry of External Affairs, n.d.).

Victim Protection and Support

- Legal frameworks often include provisions for the protection and support of victims of human trafficking. This may involve measures such as providing shelter, medical care, legal assistance, reintegration services, and access to support services.
- Victim-centered approaches aim to prioritize the needs and rights of trafficking victims, including their safety, dignity, and right to assistance and compensation. Example: *Assistance of Victims of Human Trafficking*. (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2019).

International Cooperation and Collaboration

Given the transnational nature of human trafficking, international cooperation is crucial for effective law enforcement efforts. This includes sharing information and intelligence, coordinating investigations, extraditing suspects across borders, joint operations, and funding support.

Bilateral and multilateral agreements facilitate cooperation between countries in combating trafficking networks (UN Asia and Far East Institute, n.d.).

Preventive Measures

Legal frameworks often include provisions for prevention strategies, such as public awareness campaigns, education initiatives, measures to strengthen communities and vulnerable populations, and economic development programs aimed at addressing the root causes of trafficking.

Regular assessment of gaps in anti-trafficking measures goes a long way in keeping abreast of the changes and developments in anti-trafficking rules and researching strategies to alter or modify the present redundant policies. Example: *Human Trafficking Data Collection Activities, 2024* (US Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2024).

The fight against human trafficking demands a comprehensive, multifaceted approach involving robust legal frameworks, effective law enforcement efforts, and cooperation between governments, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Efforts must focus on prevention, prosecution of perpetrators, protection and support for victims, and addressing the root causes such as poverty, inequality, and lack of education. By implementing comprehensive laws, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, and prioritizing victim protection, nations can work together to eradicate this egregious violation of human rights to ensure justice for victims of trafficking and create a world free from exploitation and abuse.

The Problem of Human Trafficking Persists

As we have seen, the persistence and apparent increases in human trafficking are related to many factors, including the increasing globalization/modernization/development process. In addition to the commodification of people and increased demands in countries of destination, traffickers may pressure people in poverty to make difficult decisions about how to meet basic economic needs, which may lead to their cooperation in selling women and children into debt bondage. In many cases, courts withdraw cases related to trafficking based on apparent parental consent to the activity. Police authorities, state governments, and international bodies must recognize the problem. The hardships of daily life, combined with prevalent gender stereotypes that view women as sexual objects and young girls and widows as a household burden, also contribute to placing women and girls at the risk of trafficking.

Gender discrimination, violence against women, and a patriarchal mindset contribute significantly to the vulnerability of women and girl children. This manifests in serious violations of women's rights, such as the high incidence of female feticide (destruction or abortion of a fetus) and infanticide; and the discrimination against women in health-care, education, and employment.

Prevention strategies should address these factors by focusing on efforts to eradicate poverty, illiteracy, etc. There should be special initiatives and packages for women and children in communities where entry into commercial sexual exploitation may be perceived as the only available option. Education and other services should be oriented towards capacity building and empowerment of vulnerable groups. Programs could stop second-generation trafficking by providing educational options to the children of sex workers and other vulnerable children; and facilitate rehabilitation processes by providing livelihood options to returnees and women in vulnerable conditions.

Police efforts, state departments, and NGOs must better disseminate and share information. Prevention of trafficking in source areas requires a working partnership between the police and NGOs. Public awareness campaigns and community participation are key to prevention programs. Prevention is best achieved by community policing. Border officials, police, and NGOs should network to combat trafficking. State parties must establish policies, programs, and other measures aimed at preventing trafficking and protecting trafficked persons from re-victimization.

The existence of vulnerable situations of inequality and injustice coupled with the exploitation of the victims' circumstances by the traffickers and others cause untold harm to trafficked victims, who face a number of human rights violations. Therefore, policies, programs, and strategies that address prevention have to be unique with a focus on and an orientation toward all these issues. Accordingly, the prevention of trafficking must be addressed not only in relation to the source areas but also in the demand areas, the transit points, and the trafficking routes (Shukla & Phookan, 2013).

Summary

Human trafficking is a multidimensional problem rooted in complex economic, social, and cultural factors that vary across regions and have intensified with globalization. It represents a grave violation of human rights, including the fundamental rights to freedom, security, and dignity. Gender inequality and discrimination play a significant role in heightening the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. As an organized crime, human trafficking poses significant challenges, particularly in the rescue and rehabilitation of victims. Sensitizing law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and other stakeholders is critical to improving their ability to address this issue effectively. The lack of coordination among key actors, including government bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media, and society, should specifically be addressed.

Addressing these gaps in knowledge, skills, resources, and sensitivity is vital to comprehensively combat human trafficking and ensure the protection and dignity of victims. Prevention strategies are equally vital, which include addressing root causes such as poverty, gender inequality, and lack of education through community outreach, awareness campaigns, and socio-economic reforms. Joint and coordinated efforts between governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies are essential for combating human trafficking, paving the way for a future where human rights and dignity are upheld.

Review Questions

The United Nations' Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocols is also known as:

- Geneva protocol
- Kyoto protocol
- Palermo protocol
- Warsaw protocol



What does human trafficking primarily violate?

- Economic rights
- Human rights
- Trade agreements
- Environmental policies



What is an essential quality for law enforcement officers dealing with human trafficking cases?

- Financial support
- Political affiliation
- Sensitivity training and victim support knowledge
- Physical fitness training



Which international organization primarily works to combat human trafficking?

- World Trade Organization (WTO)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)



What is the common factor that increases vulnerability to human trafficking?

- Lack of education
- Poverty
- Job security
- Pay disparity



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggender violence/?p=275#h5p-7>

Answer key: 1. c., 2. b., 3. c., 4. d., 5. b.

Questions for Reflection

1. List elements that constitute trafficking, according to the 2000 UN Protocol. Describe the factors of cause and demand that increase the likelihood that particular people or groups of people will be vulnerable to trafficking. Who is at greater risk?
2. In what ways does the intersection of gender and race amplify the vulnerabilities that lead to human trafficking? How can an intersectional understanding of the complexities of identity shape more effective prevention and intervention strategies?
3. What unique factors contribute to the prevalence of IPV amongst LGBTQIA+ relationships, and how do these factors differ from heterosexual IPV?
4. What, according to you, should be a gender-responsive rights-based approach to anti-trafficking interventions involving various stakeholders? (Hints: prioritize recognizing trafficking as a serious violation of human rights, addressing gender inequality, focusing on gender sensitization and a need-based approach, and better law enforcement, including prevention, protection, prosecution, and international cooperation.)

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TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN GENDER VIOLENCE

Virginija Jurėnienė

Abstract

The first section of the chapter discusses the definitions and causes of gender violence, the interconnections of gender violence at the interpersonal and structural levels, the victims of technology-based violence, and case studies on how to combat gender violence. The second section discusses the numerous sorts of gender violence encouraged by technology, including the types of technical violence against women, the effects on victims, and measures to protect them from the various types of technological violence that may occur.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will define the concept of technological violence, identify the levels at which technological gender violence intersect, and describe the various types of technological gender violence
- Students will analyze the causes, prevalence, and impacts of technological violence against women, LGBTQIA+ people, and children
- Students will identify the motives and behavior of technological abusers
- Students will distinguish between the positive and negative consequences of technological progress
- Students will describe the effects on victims of technological gender violence
- Students will provide some examples of resistance/protection against technological gender violence

Definitions and Causes of Gender Violence

The links between gender violence (GV) and technology are nothing new. The 1938 play “Gas Light” presented a vivid illustration of a Victorian husband’s technologically facilitated abuse through his manipulation of household gaslights, to flicker and dim at unexpected times, with the aim of making his wife doubt her own sanity. The term “gaslighting” is now widely used to refer to psychological abuse where the abuser uses false or distorted information to make their victim doubt their own memories and judgements (Barter & Koulu, 2021).

From the first half of the 20th century to the present day, society has developed very rapidly. Technological progress has had a major impact on its transformation (from traditional industrial to post-industrial). The latest technological advances were the beginning of the era of the computer, the internet, robotics, and artificial intelligence. These are commonly known as the fourth and fifth industrial revolutions. As technology changes, so does society. Post-industrial society is described as a society of smart technologies, knowledge, and creativity. However, together with technology, it has been and is changing the relationships between people, not only in a positive sense, but also in a negative sense. The negative uses of technology are sexual and technological violence against LGBTQIA+ people, women, and children.

Digital technologies and gender violence (GV) interconnect at two levels:

- *Interpersonal* (our personal and intimate relationships with partners, family, friends, peers, colleagues)
- *Structural* (our communication and interface with social institutions and state infrastructure). Violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances

GV at the individual level reflects and reinforces structural dynamics such as sexism and racism. At the beginning of the 21st century, many laws have been passed at the international level by UNESCO, the European Commission, the European Parliament, and at the level of nation states to prevent gender violence against children. However, in the last decade, there has also been a great deal of attention paid not only to physical, emotional, psychological, and financial violence, but also to technological violence.

Currently, a large part of the legislative and societal response to all types of violence is focused on the technological, and especially on online platforms where different forms of violence and abuse take place, including social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn), online content and discussion sites (e.g., Reddit), search engines (e.g. Google), messaging services (e.g., Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, WeChat, Skype), blogs, dating sites and apps, media and newspaper comment sections, forums (e.g. 4chan), online video game chat rooms, etc.

Concepts of technological violence against women

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Concept</i>
International Center for Research on Women (Hinson et al., 2018)	Technology-facilitated gender violence is action by one or more people that harms others based on their sexual or gender identity or by enforcing harmful gender norms. This action is carried out using the internet and/or mobile technology and includes stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech, and exploitation.
UN Women (2025)	Technology-facilitated gender violence is any act that is committed or amplified using digital tools or technologies causing physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm to women and girls because of their gender.

Digital violence can aggravate offline forms of violence—including sexual harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence, trafficking, and sexual exploitation—through the use of digital tools like mobile phones, GPS, and tracking devices. For instance, traffickers often use technology to profile, recruit, control, and exploit their victims (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

The UN report *Technology-Facilitated Gender Based Violence* stated that the impact of digital violence can be as harmful as offline violence, with negative effects on the health and wellbeing of women and girls as well as serious economic, social, and political impacts (UN Women, 2023a). Digital violence can limit the participation of women online, thus increasing the digital gender divide and limiting women’s voices. ITU reported that there is a significant concern given that the majority of the estimated 2.9 billion people who remain unconnected to the internet are women and girls (International Telecommunication Union, 2023a).

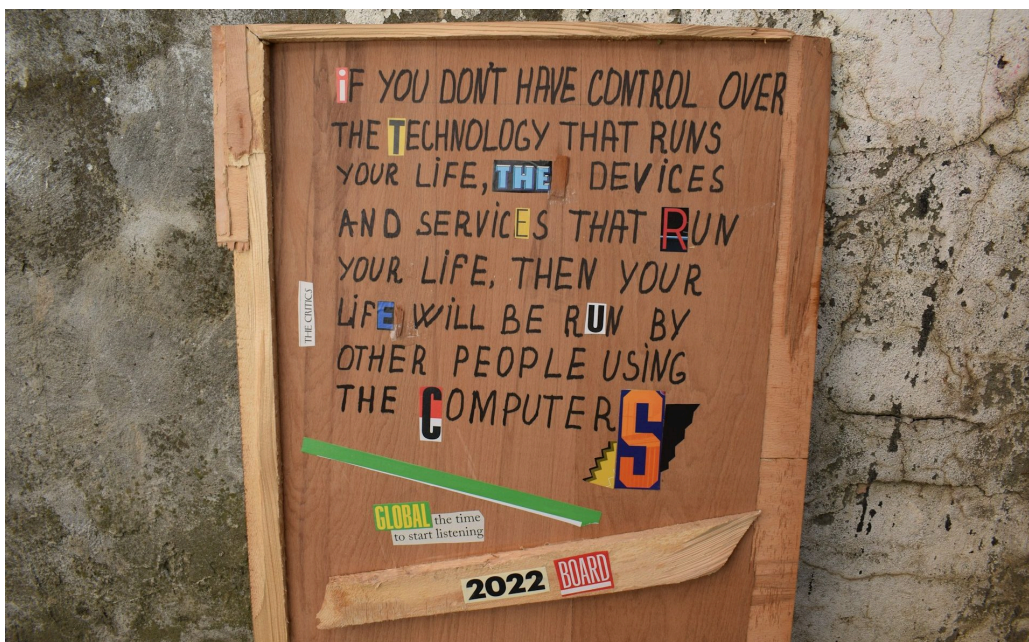
In its report *Global Evidence on the Prevalence and Impact of Online Gender-based Violence (OGBV)*, the Institute of Development Studies stated that between 16 and 58% of women have experienced technology-facilitated gender violence (Hicks, 2021). Thus, the evidence shows that women and girls are disproportionately affected by technological violence. There are also groups of women identified as being at higher risk of online violence, such as:

- Young women and girls
- Women in public life
- LGBTQIA+ people
- Racial, minority, and migrant women groups
- Women with disabilities (UN Women, 2023b)

However, access to digital technologies must also be taken into consideration, as different parts of the world do not have the same level of internet availability and access to digital infrastructure, including connectivity and broadband speeds, access to digital devices, disability and digital literacy, lack of computer equipment or even smartphones. The latter are mostly not available to girls and women in developing countries. In 2022, 2.7 billion people still lacked internet access. Globally, 70 percent of men are using the Internet, compared with 65 percent of women—both slight increases from 2022 figures—but women account for a disproportionate share of the global offline population, outnumbering male non-users by 17 percent. The gender gap is even more concerning in lower-income nations in which

21 percent of women are online compared to 32 percent of men, a figure that has not improved since 2019 (International Telecommunication Union, 2022a, 2022b, 2023b). It can be assumed that emerging new technologies and increasing amounts of information will widen the gap between women from different social strata and different countries of development, but will also reduce opportunities for their accessibility and use, while at the same time creating conditions for the technological and online exploitation of women.

In their 2015 wake-up call, the United Nations reported that globally, three-quarters of women online have been exposed to some form of cyber violence, with nine million women in 28 European countries being victimized (Duhaime-Ross, 2015). We have also seen how state apparatus has been used to censor women's digital self-expression; for example, the Egyptian public prosecutors' aggressive targeting and prosecution of female TikTok influencers for violating public morals, while Egyptian men routinely receive immunity for sexual violence (Barter & Koulu, 2021; Begum, 2021).



Access to digital technologies disproportionately disadvantages women, girls, and other marginalized groups

Lack of computer skills for girls and women will make it difficult for them to enter the labor market. And once they do, they will be unable to take up more demanding jobs, as the digital age requires not only a good knowledge of IT as a user, but also as a developer of its programs. The latest global data confirm ongoing challenges preventing women from equally engaging in dynamic and innovative economic sectors. Women are two times less likely than men to know a computer programming language, based on data from 62 countries and areas with data from 2017 or later. In 2022, inventors listed on international patent applications were five times less likely to be female than male. In 2020, women held only one in three research positions worldwide; and only one in five science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) jobs. Their absence in the emerging AI industry has already had an adverse impact on how well this technology supports women and responds to their needs. Facial and voice recognition systems, for example, predominantly designed by men, are more adept at recognizing male voices and lighter-skinned male faces; darker-skinned females are the most misclassified group (Azcona et al., 2023, p. 19). Issues of access to the most modern technologies can therefore reinforce the power relations that characterize many forms of violence against women.

The development and accessibility of new technologies also have positive effects:

First, digital technologies are also used to provide services for survivors of trauma. While such interventions could be criticized for being faceless and distant, for some they provide an accessible means of support that is not dependent on childcare and work commitments.

Second, technological violence has created a fourth wave of feminism worldwide. Digital technologies also provide opportunities for social activism, resistance, and recovery. The digital environment allows for new spatial forms and enables geographically distant and diverse communities to connect. It allows the emergence of communities based on shared interests and experiences, allowing not only the expression of experiences and injustices but also the chance to come together in a common struggle against different forms of violence. Global campaigns, including #metoo, #timesup, and #Delhibraveheart; and viral survivor statements such as “All are welcome” and “The list” are prime examples. Similarly, crowdfunded justice campaigns for survivors of violence against women have demonstrated the potential of the digital environment to democratize access to voice and resist exclusion. Crowdfunded justice campaigns have emerged as powerful tools for survivors of violence against women, leveraging the digital environment to democratize access to support and amplify marginalized voices. By utilizing online platforms, these campaigns enable survivors to share their stories, mobilize resources, and foster community solidarity, effectively challenging systemic exclusion. Digital activism is thriving and, according to some, is an integral part of the fourth wave of feminism, building solidarity across national divides (Jain, 2020). However, as Jain also warns, “cyberfeminism cannot be seen as a panacea for the universal demand for gender equality” (2020), as digital inequalities “create a disintegration of the idea of a ‘universal’ cyber feminist movement.” This highlights the need for online GV activism to be closely linked to resistance movements on the ground to make it accessible to women and girls who lack digital access (Barter & Koulu, 2021).

In summary, technological violence against women is a common phenomenon in the world in the third decade of the 21st century. It is particularly strong against women and children who do not have basic computer literacy, access to the internet, or even a simple smartphone. IT knowledge and education, social status, and the level of development of the state and society are important factors here. However, there is also a positive aspect to techno-cognitive progress, which has given rise to a fourth wave of feminism known as cyberfeminism. This emerging wave, together with legal institutions and public education, will help to prevent technological violence against women. To this goal, the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse was established (UN Women, 2023c).

Case Study

The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (Global Partnership) will bring together countries, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to better prioritize, understand, prevent, and address the growing scourge of technology-facilitated gender violence. The Global Partnership is also an action coalition as part of the Denmark-led Technology for Democracy initiative. It will address gender-based online harassment and abuse in the long term, with an initial mission to deliver concrete results by the end of 2022 (Crockett & Vogelstein, 2022).

The Global Partnership will focus its work on three strategic objectives:

Develop and advance shared principles. Partners will develop a collection/ compendium of international best practices and principles that situate certain forms of gender-based online harassment and abuse as a type of intersectional gender discrimination, as a threat to democratic values—particularly in the context of gendered disinformation in elections—and, where applicable, as a violation or abuse of human rights with reference to both international and regional instruments. This includes emphasizing the need for greater accountability for perpetrators and framing the experience of gender-based online harassment and abuse as an impediment to individuals’ ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression, enjoy their rights related to privacy, and fully and equally participate in civic and political life.

Increase targeted programming and resources. Together, partners will focus resources on preventing and responding to gender-based online harassment and abuse, including programs that provide training and support to civil-society organizations, journalists, and politically active women on best practices to document and respond to technology-facilitated gender violence.

Expand reliable, comparable data and access to it. Partners will improve the regular collection of comparable data (at the national, regional, and global levels) on gender-based online harassment and abuse and its effects by governments, international organizations, technology platforms, and non-governmental organizations. They will also pilot and evaluate innovative, evidence-informed interventions. Such data should be collected in accordance with safety and ethical standards, and measure the prevalence, impact, and political and economic costs of gender-based online harassment and abuse, particularly at the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The Global Partnership will also invest in building a rigorous evidence base to enhance understanding of risk and protective factors associated with experiencing and perpetrating gender-based online harassment and abuse.

As members of the Global Partnership, countries share several goals and expectations. By joining the Partnership, partners commit to:

- Prioritize the problem of gender-based online harassment and abuse and act in coordination with others to fulfill the Partnership’s three strategic objectives
- Devote the necessary time and staffing to make meaningful progress in achieving those objectives in 2022
- Advance activities within their own countries to prioritize and address gender-based online harassment and abuse, and collaborate with non-members to help advance the Partnership
- Refrain from and oppose the spread of gendered disinformation or any other form of gender-based online harassment and abuse by any state

Membership. The United States, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, and the Republic of Korea formed the initial set of member countries in the Global Partnership (US Department of State, 2022). Some changes have occurred since then (see “Learning Activity: Understanding the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse”).

Learning Activity: Understanding the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse

Objective: Students will examine the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse and analyze its strategic objectives. They will identify current and former member states, explain when and why some states are no longer members, and identify organizations with similar objectives.

1. Visit the following White House archived document (of the Biden Administration): [Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse | GPC | The White House](#)
2. In groups, discuss the purpose of the organization and its three start-up strategies.
3. Make suggestions on how the strategies can be detailed by analyzing each strategic objective into tasks, objectives, time periods, and implementers.
4. Answer the following questions:
 - What is your understanding of the definition of technological violence? Why is it a dangerous phenomenon? Why is it important to recognize it?
 - Which gender is most likely to engage in technological violence?
 - Identify and discuss the consequences of technological violence, especially the impacts on victims.
 - What prevention and response measures need to be taken to prevent technological crimes against women and their impact on victims or survivors?
5. Now, visit the Policy Paper (2025) by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office at [The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse calls for gender to be an integral part of the AI Action Summit – GOV.UK](#) and examine the list of member countries. Do some research to answer the following questions:
 - Which countries are no longer members of the Partnership? Have other countries become members?
 - Is the Partnership still a viable organization? If so, what actions or initiatives is it engaged in?
 - What, if any, similar entities are extant? Are they effective? What resources might be needed?

Types of Gender Violence Promoted by Technology

Technology-facilitated GV occurs across a range of relationships. Technology-facilitated GV is informed by the connection or relationship between the victim/survivor and the perpetrator. Lenhart et al. (2016) identified nine types of harassment, including physical threats, name-calling, impersonation, spreading rumors, and encouraging others to harass a target (as cited in Marwick, 2021).

1. *Cyberstalking*: Persistent and unwanted surveillance, harassment, or intimidation through electronic means such as emails, social media, or messaging apps.
2. *Cyberbullying*: One form of cyber violence which has been well-studied and defined in detail by the EU institutions. It is understood as a form of cyber harassment most commonly affecting minors, regardless of their gender. It consists of repeated aggressive online behavior with the objective of frightening and undermining someone's self-esteem or reputation, which sometimes pushes vulnerable individuals to depression and suicide. The European Parliament defined cyberbullying in a 2016 study as the "repeated verbal or psychological harassment carried out by an individual or group against others" (Van Der Wilk, 2018).
3. *Cyber Harassment*:
 - Trolling (online harassment). Verbal abuse, threats, or derogatory comments directed at individuals based on their gender, perceived gender identity, or sexual orientation; often occur in online forums, social media platforms, or gaming communities.
 - Cyberbullying consists of repeated behavior using textual or graphical content with the aim of frightening and undermining someone's self-esteem or reputation.
 - Threats of violence, including rape threats, death threats, etc., directed at the victim and/or their offspring and relatives; or incitement to physical violence.
 - Unsolicited receiving of sexually explicit materials.
 - Mobbing refers to the act of choosing and targeting someone to bully or harass through a hostile mob deployment, sometimes including hundreds or thousands of people (Van Der Wilk, 2018).
4. *Online Disinformation*: Spreading false or misleading information about individuals or groups based on their gender, perceived gender identity, or sexual orientation, often with the intent to incite hatred, discrimination, or violence.
5. *Online Sexual Exploitation*: Coercing, manipulating, or deceiving individuals into engaging in sexual activities online, which may include sextortion, grooming, or luring through social media.



Online harassment of women includes cyber-stalking, doxxing, trolling, hate speech, intimidation, shaming, and threats

6. *Revenge Porn*: Non-consensual distribution of intimate or sexual images or videos, often to shame, humiliate, or exert control over the victim.
7. *Doxxing (revealing personal information)*: Publishing private or identifying information about individuals online without their consent, leading to harassment, stalking, or real-world consequences.
8. *Tech-Facilitated Domestic Abuse*: Abusers using technology to monitor, control, or manipulate their partners, such as through spyware, GPS tracking devices, or controlling access to digital devices and accounts.
9. *Sexist Hate Speech*: Sexist Hate Speech is defined as expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on sex:
 - Posting and sharing violent content consists of portraying women as sexual objects or targets of violence
 - Use of sexist and insulting comments, abusing women for expressing their views and for turning away sexual advances
 - Pushing women to commit suicide
 - Hate speech has proliferated online, with white-supremacist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQIA+, and women-hating groups finding spaces to gather and promote their discriminatory beliefs

The term “hate speech online against women” encompasses different types of cyber violence, such as cyber harassment, cyberstalking, non-consensual image abuse, and also the specific term “sexist hate speech.” There is, however, no commonly accepted terminology for these relatively new forms of violence against women.

Direct Violence

Some forms of cyber violence against women have a direct impact on their immediate physical safety:

- *Trafficking* of women using technological means such as recruitment, luring women into prostitution, and sharing stolen graphical content to advertise for prostitution
- *Sexualized extortion*, also called sextortion and identity theft resulting in physical abuse
- *Online grooming* consists of setting up an online abusive relationship with a child, to bring the child into sexual abuse or child-trafficking situations. The term “grooming” is criticized by victims, as it covers the child sexual abuse dimension of the act
- *In real-world attacks* is defined as cyber violence having repercussions in “real life” (Van Der Wilk, 2018)

Threats

In the context of online behavior, “threats” refers to any communication or action that expresses an intention to cause harm, fear, or intimidation towards an individual or group. Threats can manifest in various forms and can have serious consequences for the victims. Threats in the digital realm can take many forms, including:

- *Direct Threats*: Explicit statements or messages that communicate a clear intention to cause harm, such as physical violence, property damage, or emotional distress
- *Implied Threats*: Communications or behaviors that suggest a potential for harm without explicitly stating it, such as menacing gestures, veiled language, or symbolic actions
- *Online Threats*: Threats communicated through digital channels, including email, social media, messaging apps, online forums, or gaming platforms
- *Cyber Threats*: Threats that involve the use of technology or hacking tools to inflict harm, such as cyberbullying, hacking, doxing, or spreading malware

Learning Activity: Media Literacy

Objective: Students will analyze how online radicalization fosters the recruitment of young people into misogynistic culture. They will develop the ability to critically evaluate online content aimed at perpetuating sexist messaging and identify the strategies used to spread such harmful ideologies, which will help them develop critical media literacy skills.

1. Choose two “news” articles about a topic likely informed by sexism, but do not choose mainstream print or online newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc. Choose sources that you are unfamiliar with. Suggested topics: trans girls/women in sports, reproductive healthcare, or wage gaps. Choose sources from various viewpoints or political affiliations.
2. Next, evaluate the media source laterally. Check to see if this source has any professional affiliations. Do national or international professional organizations sponsor it? Are these organizations considered credible? Perform a quick Google Search for the media source. Do you notice any whistle-blowing about this media source? Can you fact-check the information listed in the article with peer-reviewed sources and mainstream news publications? Does the article contain hate speech or outdated language to refer to race, gender, or sexuality?
3. Share the findings with the class, paying close attention to how easy it can be to misread a media source’s intentions.

Forms of Cyberviolence

The European Commission explicitly includes “cyberviolence and harassment using new technologies” in its definition of gender violence (European Commission, 2018).

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is leading the *Technology-facilitated gender based violence: What is it, and how do we measure it?* project in partnership with the World Bank and has developed a conceptual framework that allows us to visualize the scope of cyber violence and hate speech at a glance (Hinson et al., 2018).

Technological harassers and their victims are connected. The relations are personal, interpersonal, and institutional. Technology-facilitated violence depends on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. These relationships may be personal or impersonal. Alternatively, the relationship may be institutional, where public figures or state institutions engage in GV through the use of technology to implement an ideological agenda or enforce legislation (Hinson et al., 2018). Motivation is very important: the motivation of an offender is the emotional, psychological, functional, or ideological factor(s) that drives the offender’s behavior. Motivation may be political or ideological in nature or driven by revenge. Motivation stems from the offender’s intention or determination to harm someone. Similar to motivation, intent varies according to the type of behavior, and can include psychological or physical harm, enforcement of gender norms, or rape (Hinson et al., 2018).

Motivation and intention are determined by technological access—the internet. It reveals the behavior of a technological abuser. And this is the third component. “Behavior” refers to the perpetrator’s actions or strategies, which can include stalking, defamation, bullying, sexual harassment, exploitation, and hate speech. Each behavior may be repeated with varying frequency and may be perpetrated through one or more forms of technology (modalities), such as social networking sites or entertainment platforms. Criminals use a variety of technology-based tactics, such as hacking and threat transmission, to carry out specific technology-based behaviors (Hinson et al., 2018).

Impact on Victims

Technology-driven violence on victims can include significant harm to their physical and mental health, social status and economic opportunities; and, in some cases, have led to death. The impact is divided into five categories:

- Psychological (e.g., shame, depression, or fear)
- Physical (e.g., self-harm, assault, or arrest)
- Functional (e.g., changing a route or taking down a profile)
- Economic (e.g., extortion or loss of income-generating or educational opportunities)
- Social (e.g., excluded by family, friends, or coworkers) (Hinson et al., 2018)

However, different types of technological violence will have different impacts or consequences for the victims; for example, in the case of threats.

Emotional distress: threats can cause significant psychological harm, leading to fear, anxiety, depression, trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Physical harm: In some cases, threats may escalate to physical violence or harm, posing a direct threat to the safety and well-being of the victims.

Social isolation: Victims of threats may experience social isolation, ostracism, or exclusion from their communities or social networks.

Legal and financial consequences: Depending on the severity and nature of the threats, victims may have to deal with legal issues; including criminal charges, restraining orders, or civil lawsuits. Threats can also result in financial losses, such as legal fees, medical expenses, or property damage.

Measures Against Violence

There are a variety of help-seeking or coping behaviors that a victim/survivor can take that include, but are not limited to, reporting their experience to the police, seeking health, counseling, or legal aid services, and seeking help from their social networks (Hinson et al., 2018).

In addition to the general measures to prevent and protect against technological violence, it is necessary to analyze individual cases of technological violence and to implement the necessary measures to deal with them. As an example, the case of threats can be analyzed.

Safety Planning: Victims of threats should prioritize their safety by seeking support from trusted friends, family members, or authorities; and developing a safety plan to mitigate the risk of harm.

Reporting: Victims should report threats to the appropriate authorities, such as law enforcement agencies, school administrators, or online platform moderators, to ensure proper investigation and intervention.

Legal Action: Victims may pursue legal action against perpetrators of threats through civil or criminal proceedings, including obtaining restraining orders, filing harassment charges, or seeking damages for emotional distress.

Prevention Education: Educating individuals about the consequences of making threats and promoting empathy, conflict resolution skills, and positive communication techniques can help prevent threats and promote a culture of respect and tolerance.

A global study by the “Economist Intelligence Unit” found that 38% of women have personally experienced online violence, and 85% of women who spend time online have witnessed digital violence against other women. A Pew Research Center survey of US adults in September 2017 found that 41% of Americans had personally experienced some form of online harassment in at least one of the six key ways that were measured. Gender also plays a role in the types of harassment people are likely to encounter online. Overall, men are somewhat more likely than women to say they have experienced any form of harassment online (43% vs. 38%), but similar shares of men and women have faced more severe forms of this kind of abuse. There are also differences across individual types of online harassment in the

types of negative incidents they have personally encountered online. Some 35% of men say they have been called an offensive name versus 26% of women, and being physically threatened online is more common occurrence for men rather than women (16% vs. 11%). Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to report having been sexually harassed online (16% vs. 5%) or stalked (13% vs. 9%). Young women are particularly likely to have experienced sexual harassment online. Fully 33% of women under 35 say they have been sexually harassed online, while 11% of men under 35 say the same. Lesbian, gay, or bisexual adults are particularly likely to face harassment online. Roughly seven-in-ten have encountered any harassment online and fully 51% have been targeted for more severe forms of online abuse. By comparison, about four-in-ten straight adults have endured any form of harassment online, and only 23% have undergone any of the more severe behaviors (Vogels, 2021).

Digital violence can increase offline forms of violence—including sexual harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence, trafficking, and sexual exploitation—through the use of digital tools like mobile phones, GPS, and tracking devices. For instance, traffickers often use technology to profile, recruit, control, and exploit their victims (UN Women, 2025).

In summary, there are various forms of technological violence, including online harassment, cyber-violence, and others. It is important to recognize violence and to take action to prevent its spread.

Resisting Digital Violence

What more needs to happen to eliminate violence in the digital world? Here are some suggestions:

Enhance cooperation between governments, the technology sector, women’s rights organizations, and civil society to strengthen policies.

Address data gaps to increase understanding about the causes of violence and the profiles of perpetrators and to inform prevention and response efforts.

Develop and implement laws and regulations with the participation of survivors and women’s organizations.

Develop standards of accountability for internet intermediaries and technology sector to enhance transparency and accountability on digital violence and the use of data.

Integrate digital citizenship and ethical use of digital tools into school curricula to foster positive social norms online and off, sensitize young people—especially young men and boys—caregivers, and educators to ethical and responsible online behavior.

Strengthen collective action of public and private sector entities and women’s rights organizations.

Empower women and girls to participate and lead in the technology sector to inform the design and use of safe digital tools and spaces free of violence.

Ensure that public and private sector entities *prioritize the prevention and elimination of digital violence*, through human rights-based design approaches and adequate investments.

Summary

We have seen that new information technologies can be used in negative ways against LGBTQIA+ people, women, and children, at the interpersonal and structural levels. Digital and online violence include behaviors like cyber bullying and harassment, online disinformation, doxxing, and sexist hate speech. Digital and online violence can allow and aggravate offline violence as well, from interpersonal violence to trafficking. Impacts on victims can be serious and include psychological, physical, economic, and social harms.

We have also seen that measures exist to resist and reduce these kinds of violence; from individual safety planning, reporting, and legal actions to cooperative national and international efforts to implement laws, accumulate relevant data, and strengthen collective public-private sector collaborations. Awareness, education, and action are needed to increase the safe and unhindered use of new technologies by women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people.

Review Questions

Digital tools used to aggravate "in real life" gender violence include (select all that apply):

Mobile/smart phones

Tracking devices

Laser printers

GPS



Positive effects of the accessibility of new digital technologies to resist GV include (select all that apply):

Access to new gaming apps

Creation of a feminist "fourth wave"

Accessible means of GV services and supports

Wireless phone chargers



Types of online GV include (select all that apply):

Mobbing

Trolling

Cyberstalking

Revenge porn



Perpetrators of technological GV may be motivated by (select all that apply):

- Anger
- An ideological agenda
- An attempt to increase or maintain social status
- Jealousy



Measures that work to prevent and respond to technological GV include (select all that apply):

- Safety planning
- Reporting technological GV
- Taking legal action
- Prevention education



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggenderviolence/?p=277#h5p-8>

Answer key: 1. a., b., and d., 2. b. and c., 3. all of the above, 4. all of the above, 5. all of the above

Questions for Reflection

1. How does exposure to the manosphere (web content that promotes misogyny) impact the beliefs, behaviors, and development of young men? What role does social media play in this process? How do the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals differ within the manosphere compared to women? What unique forms of discrimination do they face?
2. Women and girls are often targets of sexual, gendered, and sexist violence online. How does the patriarchy reinforce women's oppression in the media? How does this impact how women and girls interact more broadly with online platforms and media?
3. What are some strategies whereby individuals and groups can resist technological violence against girls, women, and LGBTQIA+ people? What resources are available? Which are still needed? Are there any ways you can help, as an individual or part of a group?

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HEALTH INEQUITIES DURING COVID-19

Mehra Shirazi

Abstract

The chapter discusses the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on historically marginalized communities and how it has intensified pre-existing systems of structural violence, further increasing their vulnerability. (V [formerly Ensler], 2021). It highlights the significant impact of the pandemic on gender and racial inequity, leading to a surge in gender violence (GV). The chapter critically examines the inadequacy of responses to COVID-19 in supporting historically marginalized and vulnerable populations, perpetuating racial and gender violence. It underscores the importance of adopting a health justice approach and highlights the initiatives of intersectional feminist organizations in utilizing a collective protection framework to address underlying structural inequities in response to COVID-19.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will explain how the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected historically marginalized communities, emphasizing the intersectionality of gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and ability
- Students will analyze the increase in gender violence (GV) during the pandemic, recognizing the power relations that create particular vulnerabilities experienced by women, communities of color, and trans and non-binary people, particularly in the context of systemic ableism and discrimination
- Students will assess the influence of the concepts of health justice and collective protection frameworks through an intersectional lens, and devise recommendations for comparable scenarios in their communities, taking into account elements of gender, race, class, age, ethnicity, and ability

Gender Violence, Racial Justice, and Health Inequities

Gender violence (GV) refers to any form of violence, harm, or abuse that is perpetrated against a person based on their gender or gender identity. GV encompasses various types of violence, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence, as well as stalking and other forms of harassment. GV can occur within intimate relationships, families, and communities or by the state and its institutions. GV is a global pandemic affecting individuals across societies, social classes, and cultures (UN General Assembly, 1993; Wirtz et al., 2020). Trans and gender non-conforming individuals face a greater risk of experiencing gender violence (GV) due to their gender identity, expression, and sexuality. There is a higher prevalence of violence against trans people of color, particularly Black trans women, and this group is disproportionately affected by fatal violence (Human Rights Campaign, 2020; Wirtz et al., 2020).

The impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, alongside global anti-racism protests, has sparked conversations about racial justice and health inequity. The World Health Organization defines health inequities as “systematic differences in the health status of different population groups. These inequities have significant social and economic costs both to individuals and societies” (WHO, 2018). These differences are reflected in epidemiological measures such as life expectancy, infant mortality, and maternal mortality, as well as in other health indicators of the population (George et al., 2023; Woolf & Schoomaker, 2019). Inequities are also apparent within the healthcare system, including biases, prejudices, and stereotypes among healthcare providers, racial biases in clinical decision-making tools, and policies and structures that limit access to quality care (Hardeman & Karbeah, 2020). Health inequities, which arise from systemic issues like oppression, power imbalances, and discrimination, are avoidable, unjust, and not inherent to individuals. They are influenced by societal norms, policies, and institutions, leading to disparities in health outcomes and access to healthcare services. Structural inequities refer to societal, institutional, and systemic factors such as racism, sexism, classism, ableism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. These factors prioritize particular identities regarding fair access to health resources and outcomes. Policies that perpetuate disparities at different levels, from local organizations to communities, counties, states, and nations, significantly shape structural inequities. These inequities are systemic, reflecting unequal distribution and access to resources, opportunities, and privileges that impact health and well-being (Braveman et al., 2022).

Health justice is essential for addressing health inequities by emphasizing the need to recognize and dismantle the root causes of disparities in healthcare access and outcomes. “As a movement, health justice seeks to recognize and build the power of individuals and communities affected by health inequities to create and sustain conditions that support health and justice” (Wiley et al., 2022, p. 637). It promotes distributive justice, referring to the ethical principle concerned with the fair allocation of resources among diverse members of a community (Shaibu et al., 2021). This principle prioritizes collective interests in universal healthcare access and integrates public health goals within healthcare decision-making. Through transdisciplinary collaboration, advocacy for systemic change, and community empowerment, health justice frameworks aim to create conditions that support health and justice for all individuals. This inclusive approach is crucial in addressing and dismantling the deeply entrenched systems of oppression that serve as barriers for oppressed groups, preventing them from accessing and receiving quality healthcare (Wiley et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has sharply emphasized the need for a health justice framework that demands immediate legal and policy responses. It emphasizes that disparities in COVID-19 infections, disease outcomes, and access to

healthcare were stark and linked not only to healthcare system discrimination and inequity but also to broader structural and institutional inequities. It is essential to address the underlying causes of health inequities, such as unequal access to healthcare, employment, housing, and education for historically marginalized and minoritized groups due to social and economic policies. Advocates for health justice prioritize distributive justice, ensuring that public investments in healthcare and public health are distributed equitably based on need. It is also imperative to engage with critical perspectives and empower communities to lead the efforts in addressing health inequities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Powell, 2021; Wiley et al., 2022).

Learning Activity: Structural Violence During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Objective: Students will analyze the relationship between structural and gender violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. They will utilize the chapter's introduced frameworks of health justice, disaster capitalism, and racialized disaster patriarchy to think critically about the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities.

1. Each group of three to four students will choose a topic below:
 - Women of Color, Gender Violence, and COVID-19 (Explore how women of color have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 health risks and increased rates of gender violence. Make sure to explore economic, social, and health inequities.)
 - Transgender and Non-Binary people, Gender Violence, and COVID-19 (Explore how COVID-19 impacted transgender and non-binary people. Pay close attention to disruptions in gender-affirming care access, increased rates of gender violence, and medical discrimination.)
 - Migrants and Refugees, Gender Violence, and COVID-19 (Explore how migrants and refugees experienced outsized COVID-19 health risks, economic hardships, and increased rates of gender violence.)
 - Disabled People, Gender Violence, and COVID-19 (Explore how disabled people experienced increased structural and social inequities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on healthcare rationing, experiences of gender violence, and accessibility issues during lockdowns.)
2. Discuss the case study your group has chosen, paying particular attention to the following key concepts: intersectionality, racialized disaster patriarchy, health justice, and disaster capitalism.
3. Identify specific examples from the chapter that show how structural violence and gender violence are interconnected and have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Pay close attention to how intersecting marginal identities impact a person's experience of COVID-19.
4. As a group, devise societal, political, and health interventions that could alleviate the impact of a global pandemic on these communities.
5. As a group, present your findings to the class.

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated existing inequities and has significantly impacted gender violence (GV). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a notable increase in GV cases, emphasizing the urgent need

for measures to protect historically marginalized groups from the double impact of COVID-19 and GV. According to a 2020 UN Women report, there has been a significant increase in gender violence (GV) during the pandemic. The report states that during the lockdowns implemented in response to COVID-19, the number of women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 who experienced sexual and physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (GV) was no less than 243 million worldwide. The report also highlights countries where GV cases have surged during the pandemic. For example, France reported a 30% increase in domestic violence cases since the lockdown, while Cyprus and Singapore saw a 30% and 33% increase in helpline calls. Argentina reported a 25% increase in emergency calls for domestic violence cases since the beginning of the lockdown. Government authorities, women's rights activists, and civil society partners in Canada, Germany, Spain, the UK, and the USA have also reported increasing reports of domestic violence during the crisis. The report also mentions that essential services responding to GV experienced increased pressure due to the escalation of violence during the pandemic. For instance, in Australia, a survey revealed that 40% of frontline workers reported requests for help by survivors, and 70% reported that the cases received have increased in complexity during the COVID-19 outbreak (UN Women, 2020).

Racialized Disaster Patriarchy

In this section, we will explore the idea of racialized disaster patriarchy in connection with the effects of COVID-19 and gender violence (GV). Naomi Klein (2005) introduced the term “disaster capitalism,” and Rachel Luft (2016) further developed this concept by introducing the idea of racialized disaster patriarchy as a framework for understanding the political economy of disasters. This term encompasses the “political, institutional, organizational, and cultural practices that converge before, during, and after disaster to produce injustice.” Racialized disaster patriarchy “links the intersectional experience of disaster to the experience of recovery and the politics of the grassroots social movement for a just reconstruction” and explores how multiple systems of oppression, including racism, capitalism, and patriarchy, intersect and intensify during and after disasters (Luft, 2016, pp. 1-2). Racialized disaster patriarchy, as applied to COVID-19, manifests in several ways, including the disproportionate impact on historically marginalized communities, the rise in gender violence, the unequal access to healthcare, the deepening of economic disparities, and limited representation and decision-making power.

Intersectionality emphasizes the importance of considering multiple forms of discrimination and oppression together rather than in isolation (Crenshaw, 1989). Pre-existing social, historical, economic, and political inequalities influence who is most affected by disasters such as COVID-19. For instance, women and people of color often have less access to resources and support, making them more vulnerable during crises. These interconnected vulnerabilities demonstrate that disasters do not occur in a vacuum but exacerbate existing disparities. Institutional and governmental responses to disasters can reinforce these inequalities. Policies and practices that do not consider the specific needs of marginalized groups can worsen their vulnerabilities, and most often, emergency response measures



Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” to describe differences in women's experiences

might fail to address the safety needs or the economic realities of communities. Amid disasters, the breakdown of social structures and the stress of crises can lead to a surge in violence.

Additionally, the isolation and economic stress caused by disasters can amplify domestic violence and other forms of GV (Bailey et al., 2017). In a 2021 article, Laster Pirtle and Wright emphasize the connections between structural racism and gender oppression in contributing to race and gender inequities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The article stresses the importance of using an intersectional analysis to comprehend the unique challenges women of color face, particularly Black women. Various studies and reports included in the article illustrate the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and Latinx Americans, leading to higher rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths compared to White Americans. The data clearly reveal racial/ethnic health inequities, and there is a consensus that structural racism plays a significant role in these disparities. The article further explores how structural gendered racism manifests in different aspects of life, including the home, work, and healthcare. In the home, women of color, especially those experiencing intimate partner violence, faced additional challenges during the pandemic. Stay-at-home orders trapped many individuals with their abusers, resulting in a significant rise in domestic violence cases.



Many women and BIPOC essential workers had to work without PPE during COVID

Additionally, women of color have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, bearing the burden of invisible labor, such as mothering, caregiving, and household responsibilities, which has had a detrimental impact on their mental and emotional well-being. In healthcare settings, women of color experience institutional and interpersonal gendered racism, which affects the quality of care they receive. Provider biases based on race, ethnicity, and gender contribute to the health disparities women of color experience and their invisibility in the healthcare system while being mistreated and denied appropriate care during the pandemic (Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021). In terms of work, women of color are overrepresented in essential jobs but are often not adequately compensated for their essential labor. They face occupational and employment stratification due to historical structural racism and racial capitalism.

The exclusion of undocumented workers from receiving financial aid packages further intensified the economic vulnerabilities faced by communities of color.

Trans and gender non-binary people have also experienced increased discrimination and violence during the pandemic. Lockdowns and economic pressures have limited their access to gender-affirming healthcare and safe spaces, leading to heightened mental health issues and exposure to GV. A 2022 study provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on discrimination and violence against LGBTQ+ communities. The study shows that various subpopulations within the LGBTQ+ community, including disabled people, immigrants, and those with lower socioeconomic status, experienced equal or higher levels of discrimination and violence. The study concludes that in addition to the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, LGBTQ+ individuals globally continue to experience ongoing systemic discrimination and violence perpetrated by government representatives, policymakers, and healthcare providers (Adamson et al., 2022).

HIV: Stories from the Streets

Yayasan Srikandi Sejati Foundation, Indonesia

“The trans community has always been and will continue to be resilient. Throughout the COVID-19 Trans Resilience Campaign, APTN will share the stories of Hope, Pain, and Survival of trans communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

(Asian Pacific Transgender Network, 2021)

My name is Icha and I'm 28 years old and live in West Jakarta, Indonesia.

I'm transwoman and stay with other trans women in a rented room in a slum area. I was diagnosed with HIV when I was 27. My education is not enough to get a formal job so I work as a beggar, singing and playing music on the street.

Since March 2020, I did not have any work. Local Government in Jakarta published policies about social distancing on a large scale in the Province. The impact of this policy is that all informal workers do not have the opportunity to work on the street. I lost my job and livelihood that could support my basic needs every day.

There have been some cases of violence that have occurred to other transwomen. My senior, her name is Mira, she was a victim of social violence in North Jakarta. I am afraid that I will not have money to support my life in the next three months. My supply of basic food is becoming limited so I have to work. I am worried that I have no income, no savings, I am afraid of being infected with COVID 19 and afraid that I will experience violence if I work on the street.

The identity card for trans women is most important. We are a group that the family rejects and we were removed from the family card which is the basis for the national identity card and to get service. Three years ago, I was sick, so the outreach worker brought me to the health service for HIV testing and ARV treatment. I found out I was HIV positive. As HIV positive, YSS helped me to get support from the Pukesmas [Government Hospital] even though I don't have an identity card. But after that I was ashamed to meet the outreach worker and avoided YSS because my status was positive even though they accepted me. But when COVID happened, the SSF staff came to me and supported me again.

Hate crimes against Asian Americans sharply increased across the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, hate incidents against Asian Americans, and particularly Asian American women, surged by nearly 150 percent. By the end of July 2020, over 2,000 anti-Asian hate incidents were reported. Asian Americans faced COVID-related discrimination, including micro-aggressions and life-threatening physical assaults. On March 16, 2021, eight people, including six Asian American women, were murdered at an Asian-owned business in the greater Atlanta area

(Stop AAPI Hate, 2022). According to Stop AAPI Hate, by the end of March 2021, over 6,600 hate incidents were reported to the tracking organization (2021). The anti-Asian rhetoric used nationally by the Trump administration was part of a long history of racism, xenophobia, and state-sponsored violence targeting Asian and Asian American communities and a carceral system that is historically and inherently responsible for violence against Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities and women.



Hate crimes against Asian Americans across the US increased sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic

In a study published in 2022, researchers found that experiences of everyday racial discrimination are a significant risk factor for worsening mental health outcomes among Asian Americans affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic's social consequences (Kaplan, 2023). The study suggests a strong link between Asian American self-reports of racial discrimination and depression, social anxiety, sleep disorders, and suicidal thoughts in this population. These results, along with similar studies, show that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively affected the mental well-being of this community (Lee et al., 2022). Violence perpetrated by law enforcement officials is closely linked to historical and collective violence against historically marginalized groups. The American Public Health Association (APHA) has acknowledged law enforcement violence as a public health issue (2018). For instance, Black men are nine times more likely to be killed by police officers than White men. During the COVID-19 pandemic, shelter-in-place and social distancing orders have often disproportionately affected disadvantaged Black and Brown communities, highlighting a pronounced disparity. State actions to enforce quarantines, such as the use of ankle monitors, tracking apps, and facial recognition, disproportionately target impoverished individuals and BIPOC communities (Kaplan & Hardy, 2020).

In Their Own Words: Asian Americans' Experiences with Discrimination During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In a 2021 Pew Research Center focus group of Asian Americans, participants discussed their experiences of being discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruiz et al., 2023).

Participants talked about *being shamed* in both public and private spaces. Some Asian immigrant participants talked about being *afraid to speak out* because of how it might impact their immigration status:

"I was walking in [the city where I live], and a White old woman was poking me in the face saying, 'You are disgusting,' and she was trying to hit me. I ran away crying. . . . At the time, I was with my boyfriend, but he also just came to the U.S., so we ran away together thinking that if we cause trouble, we could be deported."

—Immigrant woman of Korean origin in late 20s (translated from Korean)

"[A very close friend of mine] lived at [a] school dormitory, and when the pandemic just happened. . . his room was directly pasted with the adhesive tape saying things like 'Chinese virus quarantine.'"

—Immigrant man of Chinese origin in early 30s (translated from Mandarin)

Many participants talked about being *targeted because others perceive them as Chinese*, regardless of their ethnicity:

"I think the crimes [that happened] against other Asian people can happen to me while going through COVID-19. When I see a White person, I don't know if their ancestors are Scottish or German, so they will look at me and think the same. It seems that they can't distinguish between Korean and Chinese and think that we are from Asia and the onset of COVID-19 is our fault. This is something that can happen to all of us. So I think Asian Americans should come together and let people know that we are also human and we have rights. I came to think about Asian Americans that they shouldn't stay still even if they're trampled on."

—Immigrant woman of Korean origin in early 50s (translated from Korean)

Amid these incidents, some participants talked about *feeling in community and kinship* with other Asian people:

“[When I hear stories about Asian people in the news,] I feel like automatically you just have a sense of connection to someone that’s Asian. . . . [I]t makes me and my family and everyone else that I know that is Asian super mad and upset that this is happening. [For example,] the subway attacks where there was a mother who got dragged down the stairs for absolutely no reason. It just kind of makes you scared because you are Asian, and I would tell my mom, ‘You’re not going anywhere without me.’ We got pepper spray and all of that. But there is definitely a difference because you just feel a connection with them no matter if you don’t know them.”

—US-born woman of Taiwanese origin in early 20s

Some connected discrimination during the pandemic to *other times of heightened anti-Asian discrimination*. For example, one woman connected anti-Asian discrimination during COVID-19 to the period after September 11:

“[T]he hate crimes I’m reading about now are towards Chinese [people] because of COVID, but I remember after 9/11, that was—I remember the looks that people would give me on the subway but also reading the violent acts committed towards Indians of all types, just the confusion—I mean, I say confusion but I mean really they wanted to attack Muslims, but they didn’t care, they were just looking for a brown person to attack. So there’s always something that happens that then suddenly falls on one community or another.”

—US-born man of Indian origin in his late 40s

Migrants and refugees, including those undocumented, have faced severe economic and social pressures during the pandemic. Many have lost jobs and faced housing insecurities, making them more susceptible to exploitation and violence. The disruption of global trade and travel restrictions left many people in vulnerable situations without access to support networks or legal protections. An example of a refugee population most impacted by COVID-19 is the Rohingya, a Muslim ethnic minority group from Myanmar. The Rohingya have faced persecution and violence in Myanmar, particularly in the Northern Rakhine State, which has forced many of them to flee their homes. They are considered one of the most persecuted people in the world. The Rohingya refugees have sought shelter in neighboring countries, particularly in Bangladesh, where they live in overcrowded refugee camps. An estimated 1.2 million Rohingya refugees are staying in 34 camps outside Cox’s Bazar, a district in southeast Bangladesh. These refugees face numerous challenges, including poor living conditions, lack of access to healthcare, and limited economic opportunities (Chattoraj et al., 2021).

A 2022 article by Chowdhury et al. discusses the challenges faced by Rohingya refugees living in camps in Cox's Bazar in accessing sexual and gender violence (SGV) services during the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the impact of government-imposed lockdowns and restrictions on the availability and utilization of services. The findings indicate an increase in SGV incidences among Rohingya refugees; however, survivors faced barriers in reporting and accessing services, including fear of contracting COVID-19, limited access to service centers and mobile phones, lack of trust or safe spaces, and misinformation. Healthcare providers also faced challenges in delivering SGV-related services, such as restricted access to the camps, difficulties maintaining confidentiality, communication and telehealth issues, and conflicting donor expectations (Chowdhury et al., 2022).

Disabled Oracles and COVID: Devaluing Marginalized Bodies and Minds

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, systems have always tried to kill and oppress marginalized people. Attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. [Human gene editing](#). [Wildfires in California](#). [Voluntary power shutoffs by PG&E](#). Medicaid work requirements. Public charge rule. These crises and assaults reconfirm who is considered disposable and unworthy of assistance, resources, attention, and treatment. This time feels different for me with the very real threats of health care rationing and [shortage of ventilators](#) for critically ill patients in the United States.

(Wong, 2020)

Alice Wong, a disabled activist, writer, editor, and community organizer based in San Francisco and the founder and director of the Disability Visibility Project, brings attention to systematic inequities facing marginalized communities long before COVID-19. Wong highlights devaluation and inequities within ableist systems (2020).

Disability activist Finn Gardiner (2020) emphasizes the harmful consequences of devaluing marginalized bodies and minds, which leads people in positions of power to treat their lives as expendable. This devaluation is rooted in systemic and societal disregard for the worth and importance of individuals from marginalized communities, often fueled by intersecting systems of oppression.

It is essential to stress the importance of using intersectional approaches to address health inequities and dismantle harmful systems of oppression and violence. We need to acknowledge and confront these harmful dynamics, advocate for a change in power structures, and dismantle systems that perpetuate the devaluation of marginalized lives. This involves prioritizing the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, advocating for their rights and well-being, and working towards a more fair and inclusive society that respects the lives of all individuals, regardless of their social identities.



We keep us safe: Disabled BIPOC standing strong against mask bans

What is a marginalized body? Marginalized bodies are those that are deemed “less than” by society at large: women’s bodies, trans people’s bodies, disabled people’s bodies, fat people’s bodies, old people’s bodies, Black and Brown people’s bodies. Marginalized bodies fail to conform to a stated or tacit ideal, whether that ideal is thinness, youth, or gender conformity.

(Gardiner, 2020)

Ten Principles of Disability Justice

Developed by Sins Invalid (n.d.), this is a disability justice-based performance project led by disabled people of color. Visit this [site](#) and read the principles. Which of these were most pertinent to the pandemic? Which of these could be applied to other current situations? Are there any of these principles you wish others would apply to you? Are there some ways you could support these yourself?

Intersections Between Experiences of Long COVID and Intimate Partner Violence

The World Health Organization defines Long Covid as “the continuation or development of new symptoms three months after the initial SARS-CoV-2 infection, with these symptoms lasting for at least two months with no other explanation” (WHO, 2022). The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2024a) recently published a report providing a working definition of the disease. This report is grounded in scientific papers and the experiences of individuals affected by Long Covid. Additionally, a second report (2024b) details the effects of Long Covid on individuals’ bodies, lives, and daily activities. The report states,

Long COVID can result in the inability to return to work (or school for children and adolescents), poor quality of life, diminished ability to perform activities of daily living, and decreased physical and cognitive function for six months to 2 years or longer after the resolution of acute infection with SARS-CoV-2. Increased number and severity of long-term health effects correlates with decreased quality of life, physical and mental

(National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024b, p. 218).

There exists a significant gap in research regarding the intersections between Long Covid and intimate partner violence. Such research requires immediate attention to better understand and tackle the potential impact on individuals and communities. Fitz-Gibbon et al.’s (2024) survey explored the unique experiences of 28 Australian COVID survivors who had also experienced intimate partner violence (IPV). The report aimed to recognize the intersections of ableism, chronic illness, and gender violence. The participants expressed the struggle of losing control over their health, which subsequently led to a loss of control over their safety within their relationships. The report states,

Aligning with previous research on chronic illness and experiences of IPV, this study illustrates how chronic health conditions, in this case, long COVID, dramatically shape the nature, prevalence, and impact of abuse experienced by victim-survivors. Of the 28 victim-survivors who participated in this study, one-quarter said they experienced partner abuse for the first time in their relationship following their long COVID diagnosis. For those victim-survivors who had experienced abuse in their relationship prior to their long COVID status, roughly half said that the abuse changed in severity following their diagnosis, and one-third said it changed in frequency. Nearly 70 percent said the types of abusive behaviors perpetrated by their partner changed following their diagnosis. The abusive behaviors reported in this study illustrate how perpetrators often weaponize health conditions to perpetrate abusive and controlling behaviors within relationships. Taken together, the experiences of the victim-survivors in this study underscore that experiences of IPV are highly contextual, and they illustrate how perpetrators can utilize a deterioration in a person's health to inflict new and intensified forms of abuse within relationships.

(Fitz-Gibbon et al., 2024, p. 34)

Movement-Building Responses to COVID-19: Collective Protection to Address Underlying Structural Inequities

The root causes of gender violence (GV) stem from interconnected forms of structural violence. Racial and ethnically minoritized groups, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and disabled people often face higher rates of GV due to intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified existing risks of gendered and racialized violence, harm, and abuse. The exclusion of marginalized communities and women's organizations perpetuates racial and gender inequalities and hinders the development of effective, inclusive, and accessible humanitarian and public health systems. Discussing the work of Just Associates (JASS), a feminist movement support organization that strengthens the leadership and organizing capacity of community-based women networks in Southern Africa, Southeast Asia, and Mesoamerica; Okech et al. (2022) argue that the response to disease outbreaks, including COVID-19, has disproportionately ignored gender and lacks a comprehensive power analysis accounting for gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and other intersecting factors. The insufficient intersectional response is apparent in the disparity between addressing local issues and priorities and meeting the demands of funding agencies and donors. There is also a lack of comprehension of gender and human rights-based approaches to program planning and implementation, which leads to these communities being viewed only as victims rather than active participants in transformative change. A collective protection framework was developed from feminist movement-building work in JASS's three regions as a response to the increasing violence targeted at Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and the need for strategies to protect and empower women in collectives.

Summary

The collective protection framework prioritizes and draws strength from collective care, healing, action, community-driven mutual aid, community mobilization, solidarity, and respecting Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination to address and confront the structural barriers perpetuating violence and inequality. Key insights from the framework involve challenging the underlying logic of structural inequities and recognizing the significance of decolonial feminist movement-building strategies in sustaining and protecting communities during humanitarian crises like COVID-19.

Review Questions

Inequities in healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic affected women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ persons in that (select all that apply):

- They had limited access to healthcare services
- Jobs as essential workers meant they had more exposure to the virus as well as less protection from it
- Lockdowns meant many were stuck at home with an abuser
- Violence against women of color increased as "Asians" were blamed for the pandemic



"Racialized disaster patriarchy" refers to:

- Unequal pay between women of color and White men
- The fact that intersecting oppressions, including racism and capitalism, increase during and after disasters
- The inadequate access to health care by people of color
- Domestic violence takes place in patriarchal systems



During the pandemic, levels of violence increased against LGBTQIA+ people, especially those who were (select all that apply):

- Disabled
- Immigrants
- Living in poverty



Refugees and migrants faced pressures in addition to risk of illness during the pandemic, including (select all that apply):

Housing insecurity

Loss of employment or livelihood

Travel restrictions

Overcrowding in refugee camps



What percentage of people who developed Long COVID reported experiencing more severe instances of interpersonal violence after they were diagnosed with the syndrome?

50%

70%

25%

100%



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggender violence/?p=279#h5p-9>

Answer key: 1. a., b., and c., 2. b., 3. all of the above, 4. all of the above, 5. a.

Questions for Reflection

1. Naomi Klein's concept of "disaster capitalism" and Rachel Luft's concept of "racialized disaster patriarchy" offer frameworks for understanding how economic and social crises worsen systemic injustices. How can these concepts explain the increase in gender violence during the COVID-19 pandemic? Specifically, how do race, class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation power dynamics manifest in these instances of violence?
2. This chapter highlights the concept of health justice as a useful framework through which to understand disparities caused by systemic oppression, such as racism, sexism, and transphobia. How can a health justice approach to understanding systemic inequities challenge the dominant narratives surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in healthcare access and violence against marginalized groups?
3. Reflecting on the experiences shared in this chapter, how did the COVID-19 pandemic reveal or deepen the vulnerabilities in your own community or communities you are connected to? How did these moments shape your understanding of care, safety, and resilience during times of crisis?

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EXPLORING GENDER VIOLENCE AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ACCESS IN CRISIS

Kamalaveni Veni

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted services in the reproductive health care system. It exacerbated existing disparities in access to contraception, abortion services, and maternal health care services. Lockdowns halted contraceptive production and distribution services. The Guttmacher Institute predicted a 10% decline in sexual and reproductive health care services, leading to 15.4 million unintended pregnancies and over 3.3 million unsafe abortions globally (Sully et al., 2020). Healthcare disruptions disproportionately affected marginalized communities, intensifying reproductive coercion, gender violence (GV), and restricted access to indispensable care. Beyond the pandemic, reproductive health is a fundamental human right, enshrined in frameworks such as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR). However, patriarchal norms continue to restrict reproductive autonomy, reinforcing coerced pregnancies, GV, and healthcare barriers. This chapter focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reproductive healthcare access and equity, with a particular emphasis on how it exacerbated pre-existing gender and social disparities and presents a critical intersectional analysis of reproductive health access during COVID-19, calling for systemic transformation toward equity, inclusivity, and rights-based healthcare.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will describe the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender violence and challenges in accessing reproductive health services
- Students will describe strategies to strengthen resilient reproductive health systems
- Students will develop recommendations to increase the resilience of health care and minimize the need for reproductive health services in the face of future health emergencies and disease outbreaks

Reproductive Health Care, a Fundamental Human Right

Reproductive health is a fundamental human right recognized by international frameworks like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Women's sexual and reproductive health is intrinsically linked to multiple human rights, such as the right to life, freedom from torture, health, privacy, education, and non-discrimination. Both the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and the CEDAW have explicitly stated that women's right to health encompasses their sexual and reproductive health (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 1999; UN Economic and Social Council, 2000). Violations of women's sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and rights often stem from deeply in-built patriarchal beliefs that value women primarily for their reproductive abilities. These beliefs lead to early and closely spaced pregnancies, often to produce male offspring, causing severe health consequences, and women who are infertile frequently face ostracism and human rights violations.

Reproductive health directly impacts individuals' autonomy over their bodies and life choices and intersects with various forms of gender-violence (GV), significantly affecting overall physical health and social, economic, and psychological well-being. Moreover, cultural norms and societal expectations around reproduction often perpetuate harmful practices and stigmas, making policies and legal backing for reproductive rights essential. It is accepted globally that access to comprehensive reproductive health services empowers women specifically, to pursue education, careers, and personal goals, contributing to gender equality. The Beijing Platform for Action asserts that “the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence” (UN Women, 1995). Hence, reproductive health is a central issue for gender justice, and addressing reproductive health is crucial not only for providing necessary services but also for dismantling structural inequalities that perpetuate GV, justifying its own chapter in discussions on gender justice.



This public rally demonstrates the ongoing fight for access to reproductive healthcare

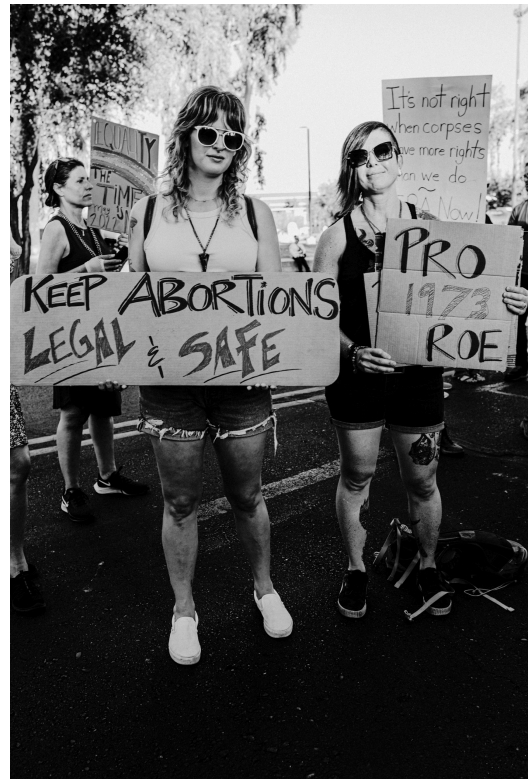
What is Reproductive Justice?

The Reproductive Justice rights are the right to have a child, the right to not have a child, and the right to parent a child or children in safe and healthy environments. Reproductive justice is the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have or not have children as desired, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. But pandemics often lead to breakdowns of social infrastructures, compounding existing weaknesses and conflicts. Existing gender inequalities are worsened by pandemic situations; for example, increasing the exposure of children and women to harassment and sexual violence when they attempt to procure necessities such as water, food, and firewood (UN Population Fund, 2020b).

Access to Reproductive Health Care Services During the Pandemic and Measures Taken

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted reproductive health services worldwide, including contraception, abortion, maternal care, and support for gender violence survivors (Kumar et al., 2020). However, the extent and nature of these disruptions varied according to the socio-cultural structure of different societies. For instance, in India's community-oriented society, reproductive health decisions are often influenced by family and community networks. During the pandemic, these structures sometimes reinforced barriers, such as limiting women's autonomy in seeking abortion or contraceptive services and perpetuating stigma around reproductive health. At the same time, India's collectivist model also enabled support systems through community health workers, self-help groups, and NGOs that stepped in to deliver essential services where formal healthcare was inaccessible (Kumar et al., 2020).

In contrast, in the United States, an individual-oriented society, access was shaped more by systemic healthcare inequalities than family or community control. Patients faced widespread delays in accessing contraception, STI and cancer screenings, and HPV vaccinations due to clinic closures and resource reallocation. Here, barriers were primarily institutional; related to insurance coverage, geographic disparities, and racial/ethnic health inequities. The pandemic resulted in significant delays in accessing essential reproductive health care, exacerbating existing health disparities and impacting overall health outcomes (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2020).



Protesters advocate for legal access to abortion and the protection of *Roe v. Wade*

Increased Vulnerability of Women During the Pandemic

UN Women (2024) emphasizes the harmful impact of violence against women on various aspects of health, including increased rates of depression, anxiety disorders, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and HIV, compared to those not experiencing violence. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified women's vulnerabilities in India by disrupting reproductive choices and access to contraception. States with weaker socioeconomic conditions, such as Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, reported significant declines in contraceptive use despite unchanged fertility preferences, exposing women to unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions. In contrast, wealthier states like Punjab, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu, and moderately developed Arunachal Pradesh, showed increased contraceptive use, likely due to stronger health infrastructure. These divergent patterns reveal how socioeconomic contexts shape reproductive autonomy. Ultimately, the pandemic widened regional inequalities, with women

in poorer states bearing a disproportionate reproductive health burden (Rahman et al., 2024). Another example is that, despite the Centre for Disease Control's removal of language suggesting delays in non-urgent visits and "elective" procedures, there was a dramatic decline in patients seeking reproductive healthcare (Weigel et al., 2020). The pandemic's disruptions in supply chains contributed to an estimated 2.7 million unplanned pregnancies and 1.2 million unsafe abortions in its first year. Moreover, 35% and 21% of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) clinics closed in the U.S. South and Midwest, respectively. A decrease in STI testing was reported across multiple countries, including Jordan, Thailand, and Uganda, with 95% of community STI testing clinics in Central Asia and Europe reducing testing. In the U.S., prescriptions for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) dropped by 80%, while follow-up care for vulnerable women in South Africa also declined (Singh et al., 2023; VanBenschoten et al., 2022). This statistic highlights the pervasive nature of gender violence and the urgent need for collective action in a post-pandemic world.

Lockdowns, social distancing, clinic closures, and quarantine measures during the COVID-19 pandemic confined individuals to their homes, often trapping women with their abusers. This isolation hindered victims' ability to seek support or escape abusive situations, leading to a significant increase in the risk of serious psychological consequences, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Brooks et al., 2020; Hawryluck et al., 2004; Reynolds et al., 2008). Furthermore, quarantine measures coincided with a surge in cases of gender violence (GV), which often went unaddressed (Usher et al., 2020). GV encompasses sexual, physical, and emotional violence, as well as neglect or deprivation, targeting individuals based on their gender (UN Women, 2020).

Pandemics exacerbate violence against women and children (VAW/C) through multiple direct and indirect pathways, including economic insecurity, social isolation, reduced access to health services, and heightened instability, underscoring the urgent need for gender-responsive policy interventions (Peterman et al., 2020). Job loss and financial stress made women more vulnerable, with the National Commission for Women (NCW) in India reporting a twofold increase in gender violence cases (Chandra, 2020). Lockdowns disrupted access to essential support services, including hotlines, shelters, and counselling, making it difficult for women to seek help or prompting fears about leaving their homes. This heightened their susceptibility to gender violence (John et al., 2020). Alcohol and substance abuse by partners, societal tolerance of violence, previous abusive relationships, threats of harm, and the lack of essential health services, including contraception and abortion, further intensified the incidence of GV during the pandemic (Ostadtaghizadeh et al., 2023).

Women from marginalized communities, including those with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, refugees, and migrants, faced heightened vulnerabilities in accessing support services. The multifaceted barriers to contraceptive care during the pandemic severely impacted reproductive autonomy and raised concerns about potential increases in unintended pregnancies (Diamond-Smith et al., 2021).

Barriers to Reproductive Healthcare Access During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened existing disparities and emerged as a barrier to women's reproductive healthcare, underscoring the critical need for reproductive justice. Disruptions in services, economic instability, and social distancing measures significantly restricted women's access to reproductive healthcare when they needed it most (Chandra, 2020). Tam et al. (2024) found that essential services, including antepartum, intrapartum, postpartum care, abortion, and sexual health services, were severely impacted, even in nations with universal healthcare systems. Financial hardships compounded these issues, as many women struggled to afford maternal care, worsened by poverty and food insecurity (Adelekan et al., 2024). During the COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria, women and adolescent girls faced significant barriers in accessing conventional sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, leading many to rely on alternative healthcare sources, such as pharmacies, traditional healers, or informal networks, to meet their reproductive health needs (Adelekan et al., 2024). For example, during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, access to maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) services was hindered by multiple barriers, including fear of infection, transportation difficulties, shortages of PPE and medical staff, and long hospital waiting times (Akaba et al., 2022). Taken together, these layered barriers highlight how the pandemic not only restricted healthcare access but also reinforced the urgent need for reproductive justice (Adelekan et al., 2024; Tam et al., 2024).



"Abortion is Healthcare" emphasizes the urgency for bodily autonomy and safe medical care

Challenges of Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services During the Pandemic

- Fear of being tested and found to be COVID-19 positive
- Distance and transportation difficulty
- Financial constraint
- Restriction of movement
- Long waiting time at health facility
- Fear of contracting COVID-19
- Health workers attending to limited number of people
- Harassment by uniformed men
- Stigmatization of unmarried youth who seek family planning

Source: Adelekan et al., 2024. Content based on Fig.1 licensed under a [Creative Commons License 4.0 International](#)

Disparities in Access to Contraceptives

The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted access to essential reproductive health services, including contraception and abortion care, leaving many without critical healthcare. Lockdown measures halted manufacturing processes, causing contraceptive shortages (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2020). The Guttmacher Institute's analysis revealed the far-reaching consequences: a 10% reduction in sexual and reproductive health services could result in an additional 15.4 million unintended pregnancies, over 3.3 million unsafe abortions, and 28,000 maternal deaths globally (Krishna, 2021). In India, the Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India (FRHS India) forecasted significant setbacks in contraceptive access, predicting negative outcomes such as unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal deaths. They outlined three scenarios to assess the pandemic's impact: the Best Case projected that 24.55 million couples would struggle to access contraceptives by mid-2020 if services resumed quickly; the Likely Case anticipated 25.63 million couples would be affected by September 2020; and the Worst Case estimated that 27.18 million couples would face challenges due to the slow resumption of services. These figures demonstrate the importance of maintaining uninterrupted access to family planning during crises (FRHS India, 2020).



The pandemic underscored the ongoing disparities in availability of contraceptives and reproductive health care

The pandemic also intensified issues of gender violence, particularly intimate partner violence. Many women faced reproductive coercion, where partners refused or sabotaged contraception, limiting women's reproductive autonomy. Over 23% of women reported being unable to refuse sex (UN Population Fund, 2020a; Kumler, 2022). Additionally, Padez Vieira et al. (2022) found that pregnant women in Portugal experienced heightened depression during the lockdown, reflecting the broader mental health impact of restricted reproductive services. The barriers to contraception and reproductive health services during the pandemic highlight the urgent need for flexible, accessible options during crises. The denial of reproductive rights emphasizes the importance of proactive policies that protect women's health and autonomy in future emergencies.

Increasing Maternal Mortality in the Wake of Health Service Disruptions

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep gaps in maternal health outcomes, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Systemic inequities, such as racism and inadequate healthcare access, contributed to higher rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. Lockdown restrictions, economic hardships, and travel bans disrupted the distribution of reproductive health products and contraceptive services (Church et al., 2020). In India, these interruptions severely impacted institutional deliveries, with media reports from states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar showing a reduction in institutional deliveries, forcing many women to opt for home births (Motihar, 2020).

Mathematical models from the Global Financing Facility (GFF) indicated that disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to a 40% increase in child mortality and a 52% rise in maternal mortality (Motihar, 2020). The

scoping review by Kotlar et al. (2021) examines the pandemic's direct and indirect effects on maternal and perinatal health, analyzing 95 studies. It highlights increased risks for pregnant individuals, such as mental health challenges and socioeconomic disparities. The fear of contracting the virus has discouraged women from seeking maternal care, leading to decreased institutional deliveries, which are crucial for reducing maternal mortality. The authors emphasized the need for stronger healthcare infrastructure and targeted resources to address these disparities. Addressing these issues is vital for advancing reproductive justice and ensuring equitable access to maternal health services during public health crises.

Intersection of Gender Violence and Abortion Rights: A Fight for Reproductive Autonomy

The connection between gender violence (GV) and abortion access reveals significant challenges in safeguarding women's reproductive rights. GV, including intimate partner violence and sexual assault, often leads to unintended pregnancies, compelling survivors to seek abortions. However, restrictive laws, stigma, and insufficient healthcare services frequently hinder access to safe and legal abortion services, pushing women toward unsafe alternatives that jeopardize their health and well-being.



Women and men lobby to ensure reproductive autonomy, including the right to abortion

The right to abortion is intertwined with several fundamental human rights, including the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (UN General Assembly, 1984). Additionally, access to abortion is vital to the broader framework of sexual and reproductive health, education, and information (UN Population Fund, 1994; UN Women, 1995). The CEDAW Committee recognizes the criminalization of abortions and forced continuation of pregnancies as forms of gender violence and discrimination, highlighting how these violations infringe upon women's

rights under CEDAW. Such restrictions force women into unsafe abortions and restrict their autonomy over their physical and mental health, further contributing to the underreporting of sexual violence.

The Supreme Court of India in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) and Anr v Union of India and Ors (2017) affirmed that “[t]he intersection between one’s mental integrity and privacy entitles the individual to freedom of self-determination,” particularly regarding gender identity, reproduction, and procreation. Similarly, the Bombay High Court emphasized that forcing a woman to continue an unwanted pregnancy “represents a violation of the woman’s bodily integrity and aggravates her mental trauma” (High Court on Its Own Motion v. State of Maharashtra, 2017 as cited in Chandra et al., 2019, p. 188). Restrictions on abortion access, exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, heightened these inequities, with many governments exploiting public health measures to further limit services, forcing women to seek unsafe alternatives and undermining their reproductive autonomy.

Learning Activity: Interactive Case Study Analysis on Gender Violence and Reproductive Health During COVID-19

Case Study 1: Gender Violence in India During COVID-19. During the COVID-19 lockdown in India, the National Commission for Women recorded a twofold increase in gender violence cases. Financial stress and confinement with abusers exacerbated the situation. Discuss the challenges women faced in seeking help and propose strategies to improve support services during such crises.

Case Study 2: Reproductive Health Challenges in the United States. In the US, over half of clinics cancelled or postponed contraceptive visits during the pandemic, significantly impacting access to reproductive health services. Analyze the barriers to accessing these services and recommend solutions to ensure continuity of care in future pandemics.

Case Study 3: Impact on Marginalized Communities in Nigeria. In Nigeria, economic hardships and law enforcement harassment prevented pregnant women from accessing maternal healthcare. Discuss the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities and suggest measures to address these disparities.

Case Study 4: Global Disruptions in Contraceptive Access. The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant decline in contraceptive access globally, with anticipated shortages and increased unintended pregnancies. Evaluate the impact on women’s health and propose strategies to mitigate such disruptions in future health emergencies.

Illustrations of Disruption in Abortion Services During COVID-19

The COVID-19 lockdown in India severely impacted access to safe abortions, as illustrated by the story of Kiran, a 20-year-old college student in Delhi. Kiran, who found out she was pregnant in May 2020, initially tried to terminate the pregnancy using abortion pills, but they were ineffective. As her only option was a surgical abortion, Kiran faced significant challenges due to the lockdown, which restricted travel and limited hospital services to essential care only. Despite contraception and abortion being classified as essential, many hospitals shut down outpatient departments and cancelled elective surgeries, complicating access to reproductive health services (Rao, 2020).



Marchers attended rallies during the pandemic to ensure reproductive justice

Kiran's struggle is part of a broader issue, as research indicates that the lockdown compromised an estimated 1.85 million abortions in India. Women were pushed towards unsafe abortions or surgical procedures due to delayed access to medical abortions. Public health advocates and doctors reported an increase in calls from women seeking help for abortions but being turned away from hospitals or facing delays, particularly affecting poorer women and those in rural areas. Kiran's case was eventually resolved with the help of the Medical Support Group, a team of public health professionals who assisted her in finding a doctor for a safe abortion. This case highlights the urgent need for policy changes, such as allowing medical abortions via telemedicine and strengthening referral systems for abortion services, to ensure women's reproductive health needs are met during crises (Rao, 2020).

During India's lockdown, despite abortion being classified as an essential service, many women struggled to access safe medical care due to restricted transportation, limited healthcare services, and movement restrictions. Experts warned that this could lead women to use unsafe methods or continue with unwanted pregnancies. The stigma surrounding abortion further complicated the access.

A comprehensive review by Ochola et al. (2023) highlighted the significant interruptions in access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and the harmful impact on the well-being of women of reproductive age during the pandemic. Loss of income and employment opportunities resulted in the inability to afford healthcare costs, further reducing access to maternal healthcare services. Additionally, de-prioritization of services during the pandemic limited access to maternal healthcare, particularly among women from neighbouring communities due to entry restrictions and limited public transport. While some areas with unrestricted access to reproductive health services have observed an increase in family planning uptake among adolescents, travel restrictions and lockdown measures have likely contributed to the reduction in attendance at post-abortion care services. Adolescents emerge as a vulnerable group, with higher maternal death rates and limited access to abortion care. The increase in gender violence (GV) has been attributed to economic stressors, lack of privacy, and movement restrictions during the lockdown. Stay-at-home orders exacerbated the situation, leading to increased reports of GV cases.

Reproductive Healthcare Inequities for Marginalized Communities: Addressing Gaps for Transgender and Queer Individuals

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing barriers to reproductive healthcare, affecting contraception, prenatal care, abortion, and STI testing, with marginalized populations like LGBTQIA+ individuals, low-income groups, lower caste people, people of color, and rural communities facing the brunt of these challenges (Diamond-Smith et al., 2021; John et al., 2020). Lockdowns and healthcare interruptions further deepened disparities, although telemedicine emerged as a solution to provide reproductive healthcare services remotely. However, this method remained inaccessible to many due to the digital divide, which disproportionately affected marginalized communities (MacLean, 2021).

While women's reproductive rights have gained increasing attention globally, including in India and the USA, transgender reproductive rights remain largely overlooked.

Raj Yadav and Aditi Jain (2021) analyze the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, emphasizing its exclusion of transgender individuals, especially transgender men, from abortion rights. The paper critiques India's abortion laws for catering only to cisgender women, ignoring the unique reproductive needs of transgender people. The authors highlight legal conflicts between the MTP Act and other laws like the Pre-conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act and Protection of Child from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act (Ministry of Women and Child Development, n.d), while also discussing economic barriers. They advocate for legal reform to include transgender rights in reproductive healthcare, addressing both social and medical challenges (Shendge et al., 2024).

A literature review on transgender men's reproductive health by MacLean (2021) reveals feelings of invisibility and isolation during pregnancy due to gendered perinatal care. The lack of gender-affirming environments and experienced providers contributes to care avoidance and discrimination. The reproductive rights of transgender individuals remain overlooked in medical curricula and legal frameworks, particularly in India, where LGBTQIA+ communities are ostracized and invisibilized (MacLean, 2021). More research is essential to improve their reproductive healthcare

experiences. Similarly, Lunde et al. (2021) found that transgender and non-binary individuals globally face barriers when seeking healthcare services, due to practitioners' lack of knowledge. Rodriguez-Wallberg et al. (2023) stressed the importance of researching fertility preservation and family planning options for the transgender community.

This scoping review investigates the barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in accessing abortion care and pregnancy options counselling. The study reveals significant discrimination and healthcare avoidance, leading to unsafe abortions and adverse health outcomes. The authors advocate for gender-inclusive healthcare services and further research to address the unique needs of this marginalized community (Bowler et al., 2023). The entrenched legal frameworks defining reproductive rights through a cisgender lens underscore the need for more inclusive policies. To address these issues, documenting the lived experiences of marginalized communities is essential to sensitizing the medical field and advancing reproductive justice (Stephenson et al., 2017).

Essential Reproductive Health Care Services to Resist Gender Violence

The World Bank (2020) emphasizes the importance of maintaining essential health services during the pandemic. The pandemic presented not only a direct threat to health but also significant risks of indirect morbidity and mortality when essential health services were disrupted. Supply-side challenges included the diversion of medical personnel to COVID-19 response, overwhelmed health facilities, and disruptions in global supply chains for essential supplies. Demand-side factors included reduced use of essential services due to lockdowns, financial constraints, and fear of COVID-19 exposure. Past epidemics like Ebola and SARS have also shown declines in healthcare utilization, particularly for maternal and child health services, during crises. Preserving essential health services is crucial for safeguarding the health and well-being of mothers and children, especially during economic downturns and pandemics like COVID-19. Policymakers must incorporate SRH into emergency preparedness and response planning to mitigate indirect impacts in future outbreaks (Singh et al., 2023).

Summary

Reproductive health is an essential component of human rights and is intricately linked to gender justice. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified pre-existing inequalities in access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations and increasing incidences of gender violence (GV). During the pandemic, lockdowns and clinic closures disrupted crucial services such as contraception, abortion, and STI testing; exacerbating vulnerabilities for women, especially those from disadvantaged communities. This crisis underscored the pressing need for resilient healthcare systems equipped to address reproductive health needs while also emphasizing the importance of robust policies that prioritize reproductive justice. Such policies should ensure that all individuals can exercise bodily autonomy and make informed choices regarding their reproductive health. As we move forward, it is imperative to strengthen healthcare infrastructures, broaden access to SRH services, and confront the structural inequalities that perpetuate both GV and disparities in reproductive health access.

A comprehensive approach to reproductive justice must include the needs of all populations, particularly LGBTQIA+ individuals and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Future public health strategies should integrate sexual and reproductive health services into emergency preparedness and response plans, guaranteeing that every individual can access necessary care during crises. By advocating for reproductive rights and equitable healthcare access, we can build a more just and inclusive society. Ultimately, ensuring reproductive justice is not only vital for empowering women but also essential for advancing gender equality globally. As we reflect on the lessons learned from the pandemic, a collective commitment to addressing these inequities will be crucial in shaping a healthier and more equitable future for all.

Review Questions

What were the key disruptions to women's sexual and reproductive health services during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Increased access to telehealth services
- Closure of clinics and reduced availability of services
- Expansion of contraceptive options
- Improved public awareness campaigns



How did the interruptions in reproductive health services during the pandemic impact women from marginalized communities?

- They faced fewer health disparities
- They experienced increased access to services
- They encountered greater barriers to care and support
- They benefited from government support programs



What does the concept of reproductive justice emphasize in the context of gender violence during the pandemic?

- The right to terminate a pregnancy only
- The right to maintain bodily autonomy and parent children in safe environments
- The importance of financial independence for women
- The need for stricter laws against sexual violence



How did societal norms and patriarchal structures influence women’s vulnerability to gender violence during the pandemic?

- They provided additional support for victims
- They reduced the incidence of violence against women
- They increased isolation and dependence on abusers
- They promoted community resources for support



What was one significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reproductive healthcare access?

- Increased availability of contraceptive options
- Enhanced mental health support for pregnant individuals
- Severe disruptions in services such as contraception and abortion care
- Universal access to telemedicine for reproductive health services



Which of the following factors contributed to increased maternal mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Enhanced healthcare infrastructure
- Improved access to reproductive health services
- Economic hardships and lockdown restrictions disrupting health services
- Increased community support for pregnant individuals



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=281#h5p-10>

Answer key: 1. b., 2. c., 3. b., 4. c., 5. c., 6. c.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways did epidemiological measures during the pandemic contribute to increased gender violence, limit access to support services for victims, and enable severe physical and psychological injuries?
2. What are some disparities in reproductive health care, including access to contraception and disruptive health care systems, that impacted marginalized populations during the pandemic, leading to unintended pregnancies and maternal mortality?
3. How have epidemics disrupted essential health services, particularly maternal and birth care? Describe some structural disparities and explain the importance of protecting these services to ensure maternal and child health.

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GENDER VIOLENCE AND SPORTS

Meena Gopal

Abstract

Violence within sport is a globally acknowledged phenomenon. The UN and global sporting bodies such as the International Olympic Committee have acknowledged violence in sport and publicly responded to take steps towards prevention. The context for such widespread violence is the masculine nature of sport itself, that it has taken a long time and struggle for women to achieve inclusion and parity in participation. Media too continues to contribute to the upkeep of violence embedded within the masculine, commercial and competitive realm of sport. The experience of sexual harassment, mental trauma, abuse of young children in sport, sexualisation and objectification of women sportspersons, and feudal social relations are widely prevalent within sporting cultures across the globe. In addition, there are racialized and patriarchal perceptions of bodies of women and those at the margins within the Global South who are subject to arbitrary suspicion and discrimination. Some relief has been evident through athletes' rights activism to challenge structures of sports governance and policy.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will describe ways in which a masculinist and patriarchal value system in the sporting field engenders violence against women and other marginalized groups
- Students will explain ways in which violence in sports can be addressed by greater inclusion of diversity, use of due processes and just measures for violations of rights and arbitrary exercise of power in sport, and development of a system of care and support that is available for all who seek it

Gender Violence in Sports: A Globally Acknowledged Phenomenon

Violence within sport is a globally acknowledged phenomenon. The UN and global sporting bodies have acknowledged violence in sport and publicly responded to take steps towards prevention. Along with doping, which is considered a bane to the well-being of athletes, sexual and gender violence has received recognition as a human rights violation.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), one of the bodies governing elite sports, recognizes that sexual harassment and abuse is rampant at all levels of sport and expresses the need to protect athletes from violence and abuse. They also acknowledge the power that sporting authorities exercise, identifying them as primary perpetrators of abuse. The IOC initiated a process where athletes' health and well-being were prioritized, as a part of which an IOC Medical Commission (MC) prepared a set of guidelines following extended consultations, and the MC was mandated to address emerging issues such as nutrition, sex reassignment in sport, training of child athletes, and sexual harassment and abuse in sport.

The statement adopted by the IOC Medical Commission (2007) provides a broad definition based on research, experience, and scientific evidence, that includes sexual harassment, sexual abuse, gender harassment, hazing that involves sexualized initiation practices that affect young and upcoming athletes; it also adds homophobia as part of the spectrum of discrimination and victimization of athletes. In specifically identifying such a range of behaviors and practices of violence, the IOC reiterates that violence and abuse “stem from power relations and abuses of power . . . and happen in all sports at all levels” (International Olympic Committee, 2007, p. 3). This is indeed a good sign for the world of sport, when one of the highest bodies acknowledges and sets before itself a task to protect the vulnerable in sport and ensure their well-being. Yet violence continues.

Women's Sport in a Masculine Field

Despite the male-dominated context in which sport has evolved and continues to be embedded, it offers a space to explore the joys of embodiment, and experience the pleasures in extending the human body in communion with others to discover camaraderie and fulfilment. It also provides a democratic impulse with inclusion of all genders, sexualities, ages, races, castes, ethnicities, religious groups, and persons with diverse abilities, not just in the realm of elite competitive sport, but also in mass and everyday recreational sporting engagement. However, this involvement has not been without daily struggle, often even violence, by those at the margins, including women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and others whose bodies may not conform with stereotypical ideas of femininity and masculinity.

The context for such widespread violence is the masculine nature of sport itself. It has really taken ages for women's presence and participation in sport to reach a semblance of equality. Some sports continue to exclude women, and it is only in recent years that women have found a presence in them. Hence it needs to be acknowledged that sport prevails within a highly gendered social context.

The International Olympic Committee and “Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport”

On February 8, 2007, the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) adopted a Consensus Statement on “Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport.”

The following is an excerpt from that statement.

This unique document defines the problems, identifies the risk factors, and provides guidelines for prevention and resolution. The aim of the Consensus is to improve the health and protection of athletes through the promotion of effective preventive policy as well as to increase the awareness of these problems among the people in the entourage of the athletes.

Research indicates that sexual harassment and abuse happen in all sports and at all levels, with a greater prevalence in elite sport. Members of the athlete’s entourage who are in positions of power and authority appear to be the primary perpetrators. Research also demonstrates that sexual harassment and abuse in sport seriously and negatively impact athletes’ physical and psychological health. They can damage performance and lead to athlete drop-out.

(International Olympic Committee, 2007)

Global Inclusion of Women in Various Sports

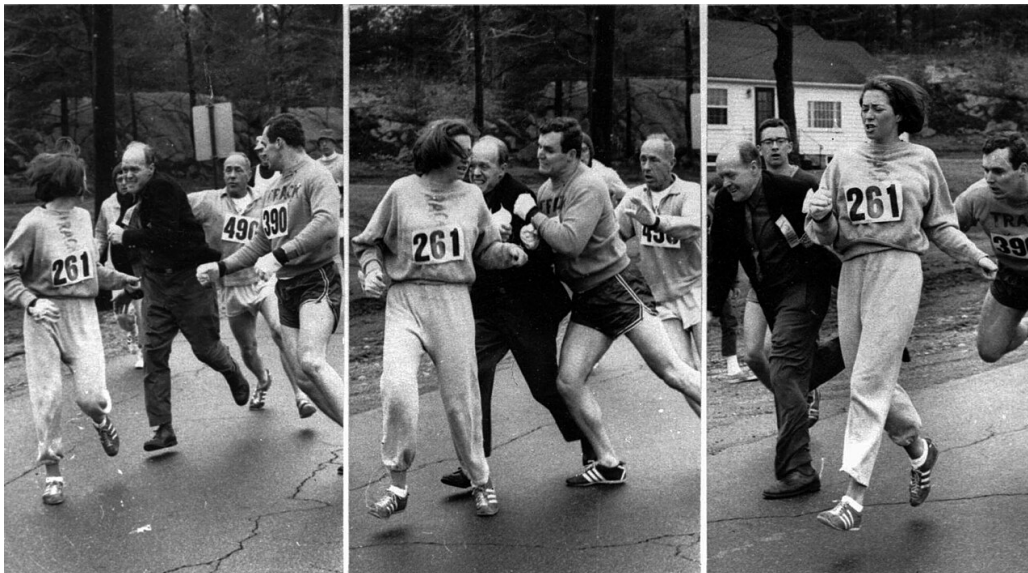
Women athletes first participated in the Olympics at Paris in 1900, four years after the modern Olympics began. At the games, 22 women out of a total of 997 athletes took part and competed in the sports of tennis, sailing, croquet, equestrian, and golf, where golf and tennis were women-only events. In 1976, this number increased, and women formed 20 percent of all participants in the Montreal Olympics. This increased to women comprising about 40% of the total participants at the Olympics, as late as 2004. In fact, at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, it was almost the same number of women (48%) participating as men.

In terms of overall presence of women in governance and management of sport, women are still under-represented. At the Tokyo Olympics, only 32 percent of accredited international technical officials were women, they comprised 13 percent of accredited coaches, and 20 percent of National Olympic Committee Chef de Missions (leaders). These statistics need to improve (International Olympic Committee, 2025). This underscores the deep structures of exclusion and discrimination at the core of sport worldwide. In this context there is tremendous potential to perpetuate violence against those at the margins.

Continued Exclusion of Women in Certain Sports

The inclusion of women's sport itself, too, has been an uphill task. In the last 20 years, the IOC has introduced a number of women's events into the Olympic program. It was only in 2012 in the London Olympic Games, with the addition of women's boxing, that women participated in every sport in the Olympic program that men did. It is worth tracing the introduction of specific sports for women over the years. While aquatics entered the Games in 1912, athletics and gymnastics were introduced only in 1928. Women's volleyball and basketball were introduced in 1964, and 1976, respectively. Women's hockey came in 1980, and football entered the Games in 1996 (International Olympic Committee, 2025).

Several factors have contributed to women entering male-dominated sports, with the growing recognition and acceptance of women's sports; equal opportunities to participate in competitions at the school and college level, the availability of training facilities and equipment; developments, including funding, in coaching and training techniques; and most of all the emergence of women role models who have broken stereotypes by persisting in competition and setting new records. An event such as the pole vault in track and field athletics is testimony to this (The Sports Reviewer, n.d.). Another event, the 3000-meter steeplechase, only became an Olympic event for women in 2008, while men ran it beginning in the 1920 Olympics.



A marathon official tries to push Kathrine Switzer out of the 1967 Boston Marathon.

These struggles for inclusion have been matched by resistance and backlash from those dominating the sport. A historic example of this was seen when Kathrine Switzer was shoved during the Boston Marathon in April 1967 halfway through the race as she broke the gender barrier for the Marathon, captured tellingly by the lens of Paul J. Connell of the Boston Globe (she continued and finished the race). Switzer had registered for the race, which did not permit women to participate, using just her initials and surname (Frye, 2019).

Coverage by Sports Media

In recent years, the complexity of the types of violence faced by women and marginalized persons—such as nonbinary people, LGBTQIA+ people, and others—within sport have been highlighted by media sources. The dominant practice in mainstream sports media and the commercialized sector within it, is to ignore female participants. In fact, scholars have reviewed how sports coverage has provided a platform for those who keep extending the normative constructions of gender as well as race (Oates, 2017). But journalists and whistle-blowers who keep to ethical reporting do highlight instances of exclusion, discrimination, and violence.

Women Journalists

As in the case of women within sport, the increasing presence of women in sports journalism has also contributed not just to covering women’s participation in traditionally male sports such as football and cricket but also to sensitively covering both on-field and off-field dimensions of the sport. In 1978, in a historic court case, Melissa Ludtke, a reporter with *Sports Illustrated*, won the right to practice her profession and cover her beat by gaining entry into the locker room of the New York Yankees, securing the same right to interview athletes and coaches as her male counterparts. The reason given by the baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn to deny women access to locker room space was to “protect the image of baseball as a family sport” and to preserve “traditional notions of decency and propriety.” But the court said that this policy violated Ludtke’s 14th Amendment rights to equal protection and due process in terms of her fundamental right to pursue her profession (Rothman, 2015). Things have not changed much in the last 40+ years, and women who did attempt to visit locker rooms for interviews found themselves faced with sexual harassment, when the players exposed themselves or made sexist and abusive remarks. With the expansion of women’s global sport, women’s leagues, and World Cup competitions, a new generation of women sports journalists have made strides in the field.

The 2023 FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) Women’s World Cup, an international competition, had an array of women journalists, but their presence has not come without struggles to enter the arena dominated by men, while also mentoring and training women journalists to cover sports.

Focus on Perpetrators of Violence

Journalist Katie Strang, who covered the Larry Nassar case in 2017, speaks of the need for investigative journalism to really capture the underbelly of violence embedded within the masculine, commercial, and competitive realm of sport. For investigative journalists covering violence, the support of the institution was absolutely necessary. An investigative journalist goes beyond just reporting a criminal offence recorded by the police, to explore the contexts generating stories in which athletes co-exist with powerful men and women who can control their lives (Chotiner, 2021).

Such a role was played by Indian journalist Mihir Vasavda in 2020 when he submitted questions to the Sports Authority of India, under the Indian law permitting public access and right to information. His queries uncovered a vast morass of despicable violations and sexual abuse of minor women athletes by male coaches in 24 centers spread across

the country, with 45 complaints over a period of 10 years reported in a prominent national daily (Vasavda, 2020). What is shocking is that the abuse was perpetrated by those in whose care, mentorship, and training the athletes were placed. This indicates the critical role of media reporters and journalists in ethical reporting of deep-seated violations through reports of in-depth coverage of incidents. These point conclusively to transparency and media scrutiny playing a significant role in due processes adopted by institutions in the resolution of cases of sexual harassment. Sports media has thus exposed the privileged dominant practices of not just the participants, but especially of those with authority within sports.

Violence That Scars Minds, Bodies, Careers

In the spectrum of violence and abuse that athletes face, sometimes over years by the same abuser; are sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and mental trauma. Those athletes who do not fall within the gender binary that the masculinized sporting field enforces are subject to suspicions of their gender, and technology and arbitration come into play to violate their rights and integrity. In most cases, young children, including boys, who are initiated into training for elite competitive sport are the most vulnerable (Hartill, 2010).

Sexual Harassment and Abuse

In early 2018, a Michigan state court sentenced Larry Nassar, a doctor with the Michigan State University and USA Gymnastics (the body overseeing the sport of gymnastics in the USA), from 40 to 175 years in prison for criminal sexual conduct in the first degree. Charges were first filed against Nassar in November 2016, following which more than 150 women complained against him of sexual abuse over years through their childhoods as aspiring gymnasts. As children, they were unable to voice the violation of their bodies, as it was cloaked in the guise of “treatment” that would heal them of their body’s pain to train again to achieve their dream of being an Olympic medalist. Three of these athletes were also Olympic gold medalists. A probe had begun by the FBI in 2015, but even the one witness they spoke to was not properly interviewed and the process formally documented (LaPook, 2019). Several athletes, including four-time Olympic champion and five-time world champion Simone Biles; stated before a US Senate hearing in 2021 that the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee, along with the federal law enforcement agencies, failed to protect athletes from abuse, despite several of them complaining over the years; thus demonstrating the complicity of the powerful coaches, administrators, and law enforcers over vulnerable young athletes, and their condoning of sexual abuse over years (Taneja, 2021).

Mental Trauma

Simone Biles, now known as one of the greatest gymnasts of all time, spoke of her anxiety and mental health troubles publicly following the Tokyo Olympics. She admitted carrying over the scars of the sexual abuse that she, along with hundreds of others, were subject to by Larry Nassar, as she testified before a Senate Committee. At the Olympics, given her state of mind, she withdrew from some events, being unable to perform to the best of her ability (Kallingal, 2021).

Biles has not been the only one to come out publicly about anxieties and pressures that the cultures of sport put on athletes. When she was world number two, Naomi Osaka was fined \$15,000 by French Open tennis championship organizers for refusing to speak to the press, and warned that she would face expulsion from the tournament if this persisted. Considering her mental health more valuable, she withdrew from the tournament. Several high profile athletes supported Osaka in her stance, signifying that it was brave to come out and speak of anxiety and vulnerability in a sport that glamorized strength and power, and a system that glorified it (Carayol, 2021). These point out the deep emotional, psychological, and mental health impacts of sporting careers that go beyond the regular physical injuries that athletes encounter.

Boys in Elite Sport

Young boys, especially in elite sport, who are subject to sexual abuse, have the mindset of the sport imposed upon them; they are unable to distinguish their self-identity from their identification with the game. Their entire subjectivity, their experience of boyhood, is co-constituted through their aspirations for excellence in the sport, into which they have put their body and soul. Coaches and mentors are those to whom they entrust their lives and who they value as ideals in their sporting lives. In such situations, reporting sexual abuse by these very same adult coaches was often an impossibility because their praise mattered more than an injury to the self. It is only later, as adults, that the athletes are able to speak of their experience, when their relationship to the sport has dimmed and they are no longer in an enchanted relationship with the sport. Unfortunately for many, even this relief may never occur (Hartill, 2010). In fact, in the Larry Nassar case, several boys, similarly scarred, came out in support of their sisters, adding their voices to their testimonies.

Body Culture and Enforcement of Stereotypes in Sport

Not only is the field of sport dominated by men, but in terms of body presentations, certain sports display themselves as bastions of masculinity. American football is one such, where rugged strength and aggressiveness of the male body is celebrated within American culture. The bodies of the players, their muscular thighs visible through their tight trousers, pads showing off the broadness of their shoulders, all symbolize hypermasculinity and place them as clearly superior to women. It would seem that American football continues to keep its reputation as the last preserve of masculinity, resisting pressures to tone down aggression, through arguments against “effeminacy” or “impulses to homoeroticism.” In fact, this behavior on the field, elevating them to the status of heroes, is enacted in everyday life; at celebrations, in clubs, and in other spaces where violence is condoned. Several National Football League players have been involved in numerous cases of crimes against women and murder cases as well (Gems & Pfister, 2009).

In India, too, wrestling, which historically has been considered a male sport, twice Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar was accused of murder following a dispute over property, where Kumar beat a former junior national champion to death. The close links of the region in northwest India to violence and hooliganism, from where many young men come to wrestling academies, are blurred as many of them return to a life of crime in a situation of rising unemployment. For many of these young men, Kumar was a hero to be emulated in sport (Vasavda & Manral, 2021).

Whereas male bodies are celebrated for presenting as masculinized, female bodies are expected to present in sexualized ways. Particular female sports enhance sexualized femininity; for instance, gymnastics, ice-skating, and synchronized swimming have routines that contain sexually suggestive movements, postures, and poses that border on the erotic. Sportswear and athletic gear also contribute to the promotion of a sexy image. While these images conform to dominant heteronormativity, they objectify female bodies rather than value their sporting ability—unlike that of men (Hargreaves, 1994). A highly masculine presence in sports governance and management contributes to a reinforcement of this norm. Despite this, some sportswomen seek to reject these images and clothing to present themselves in loose-fitting, comfortable, and non-objectified sportswear. Some of these have led to conflicting situations.



Women's beach handball match at the European Championships 2023, between Norway and Germany

In July 2021, the Norwegian women's beach handball team was fined 1500 euros for wearing “improper clothing” at the European Championship by the European Handball Association's Disciplinary Commission. The rules demand that women wear bikini bottoms; when the team led a protest wearing shorts for their match, they were fined (Radnofsky, 2021). These rules and regulations show the patriarchal character of governing bodies in sport that prefer objectification of women's bodies that denies them dignity as sportswomen.

Feudal Cultures

In other contexts, such as India, the feudal social relations, patronage, and power wielded by those in authority to grant opportunities for participation in elite competitions through favoritism and *quid pro quo* form the ground for sexual abuse. In 2023, several women wrestlers and a few men—Olympian, World Championship, Asian, and Commonwealth medalists—came out to protest the sustained sexual harassment, groping, stalking, and abuse over years by the President of the Wrestling Federation of India, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a powerful member of the ruling party of India, and a six-time member of Parliament of India. They protested with clarity and awareness that this protest and coming out publicly against a powerful leader meant an end to their careers. Despite their sustained protest, the

government did not set up processes to ensure justice, but took the side of the bosses in the federations that control the sport. Nevertheless, the wrestlers continue their protest in innovative ways (Mehrotra & Gupta, 2023).

Suspecting Gender, Targeting Racialized Bodies

When Dutee Chand, an Indian woman athlete, was barred in 2014 from international track and field competition because the amount of naturally occurring testosterone in her body had exceeded the amount stipulated by the Hyperandrogenism Regulations of World Athletics, she challenged the regulation. (As a medical term, hyperandrogenism refers to high levels of androgens (sex hormones) such as testosterone, in bodies of any sex) (Doherty, 2024). The Court of Arbitration in Sport (CAS) said that the regulation was not supported by scientific findings and sought new evidence to prove that Dutee could be disqualified for not fulfilling her eligibility as a “female” athlete. Dutee won her case, temporarily. Despite evidence emerging through feminist research on the complexity of sex and gender, the institutions of law and science prefer to abide by an “ideologically driven binary alternative” (Pape, 2021b, p. 17). The debate over the court’s decision spoke of how there is an over-representation of women of color from the Global South against whom complaints are lodged. This corresponds with a history of the targeting of black bodies as not up to the mark of femininity which is the normative prerogative of white women.

Queer Identities and Sporting Cultures

While gender has been a matter of much interrogation, it has not been easy for athletes to express their sexuality and sexual preferences as well. Dutee Chand, India’s star sprinter, came out in 2019 as a queer woman, who had been in a relationship with her woman partner since 2017. But she had to face a lot of hostility and backlash even from her family who lived in a village in Odisha state, including her sister and mother. However, the environment in the country at that time with the Supreme Court of India reading down the sections in the law that criminalized same sex relationships, helped in individuals like Dutee’s coming out. She received support from the sporting fraternity even when she faced isolation from her family (Ninan, 2021). But not everyone was as fortunate as Dutee; Pinki Pramanik, another star Indian athlete and Asian gold medalist, was charged with sexual assault by her female partner and she faced much anguish and disgrace for months by the police, hospital authorities, and the media before all charges against her were dismissed by the courts (Times News Network, 2012). Despite these stories of distress and humiliation, sport globally has had an increased presence of queer, lesbian, and gay athletes openly competing. The Tokyo Games of 2020 and the Paris Games of 2024 are evidence of this (Yip, 2024).

Questioning Gender: Body, Gender, and Sexuality

The last word on gender has not been spoken. This is so in the case of Caster Semenya, a South African 800-meter runner and winner of the Olympic gold medal at the Rio Olympics in 2016, who was subject to scrutiny about her gender. Semenya’s extraordinary performance in the 2009 World Championships had the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), now World Athletics, say that they were going to investigate ambiguities about her gender (Vox, 2019). There was hostility in the local press which questioned her gender, while her country, South Africa,

supported her and celebrated her victory as a daughter of the nation. Caster Semenya and several others like her, including Dutee Chand, who had challenged the IAAF regulations, have bodily attributes that complicate the binary gender.

Learning Activity: Gender Policing in Athletics

Objective: Students will critically examine how equal access to sports is a vital form of gender expression in today's society, for cisgender and transgender women. Additionally, students will learn how attacks on transgender women's access to sports have led to increased bodily scrutiny for all female athletes and how the legacy of gender policing in athletics intersects with histories of racism and gender policing for women of color.

1. Divide the class into three groups, with each group assigned a topic from below:
 - Transgender women in sports:
 - Analyze current controversy surrounding transgender women in sports, paying close attention to gender policing's role in the issues you have identified.
 - Analyze how transgender women are portrayed differently than cisgender women with similar biological advantages.
 - Discuss the harm of these controversies for transgender women, and the broader impact on equity in sports access.
 - Cisgender women with biological advantages:
 - Analyze cases like Serena Williams, Caster Semenya, or Imane Khelif, who have been investigated for biological advantages in sports.
 - Analyze how the scrutiny towards these women reflects gender and racial biases in sports.
 - Discuss how these cases highlight that gender policing in sports is directly connected to racism and gender policing more broadly.
 - Gender policing in sports:
 - Analyze how the focus on transgender women in sports shifts the conversation away from addressing broader social inequities in sports, including sexual harassment, sports access, funding for women's sports, etc.
 - How have the legal and policy responses for transgender women's access to sports created a ripple effect impacting cisgender women athletes, especially those with biological advantages?
 - Follow this link and write down 10 points that dispel harmful myths about transgender

women in sports. https://www.athleteally.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Future-of-Womens-Sport-includes-Transgender-Women-and-Girls-Statement_11.15.21.pdf

2. Discuss the chosen case study and the broader implications of equity and access in sports. Pay particular attention to the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in gender policing in sports and how this is connected to broader systems of oppression. Brainstorm policy interventions that could improve equity and access in sports for cisgender and transgender women.
3. Share your findings with the class.

The IAAF's Hyperandrogenism Regulations that indicate how much naturally occurring testosterone is permitted in women's bodies, work against women athletes, especially from the Global South. Such policing of natural differences in bodies did not cover male athletes such as Usain Bolt or Michael Phelps, for it seemed just a "natural advantage." The subsequent processes of the Court of Arbitration in Sport, a body comprised of mostly white men, claimed that it was "*necessary to discriminate against Semenya to preserve the integrity of female athletics,*" (emphasis added) and imposed the invasive regulation of taking steps to reduce the level of naturally occurring testosterone in her body. It seems that while science is still grappling with the questions of gender, the targeting of women of color from the Global South by white male dominated governing bodies of sport continues (Pape, 2021a; Vox, 2019). The raging debate has supporters as well as detractors.

The reality of the lives of intersex athletes are only emerging. But evidence from activism is also being reflected in the field of sport. The Malta Declaration that emerged as a statement of the Third International Intersex Forum in 2013 included the demand that intersex people are able to participate in competitive sport, at all levels, in accordance with their legal sex. It also demanded that the medical community recognize that medicalization and stigmatization of intersex people results in tremendous trauma and mental health concerns (*Malta Declaration, 2018*).



Caster Semenya at the 2011 Bislett Games



Michael Phelps wins Olympic gold in the 200m butterfly at the 2016 Rio Olympics

Histories of Humiliation

The history of such regulations determining the eligibility of women (but not men) to compete in Olympic sport is a history of humiliation and contention. Prior to the 1930s the presence of women who had differential sexual development or who did not conform to the dominant constructions of femininity in the Global North were subject to gender testing through “nude parades” or gynecological examination. From the 1930s this shifted to chromosomal testing to fit into the binary sex categories and was made mandatory for all women competitors from the 1968 Olympics to the 1990s. When the test was criticized by members of the scientific community, it was abandoned and a far-less transparent regime was adopted. From here the testing was subject to intervention in any suspicious case. Thus, not only was this political but subjective as well, throwing to the winds any semblance of reliance on science and expertise, making it wholly arbitrary. From the 2000s, the struggles and battles of several women athletes such as Santhi Soundararajan of India in 2006, Pamela Jelimo of Kenya in 2008, and finally Caster Semenya from South Africa in 2009, brought focus on the need for an overhaul of these regulations. Women were being singled out, especially from the Global South, pointing to the discrimination based on gender, race, and nationality emerging from sporting bodies (Pape, 2021b).

Global Policy and Athletes' Activism and Advocacy

Athlete rights activist and researcher Payoshni Mitra says that the culture of surveillance and suspicion is very much a part of global competitive sport. She has, in her research on sexuality, gender, and sport, realized that it is only by supporters being there to care for and struggle with these athletes on the margins that global sporting bodies can be called out for their racist, heterosexist, classist, and gender bias. Mitra had supported Dutee Chand as well as Santhi Soundararajan in their struggle against the power of global bodies that are ready to exclude any differently presenting

woman athlete. In Chand's case, Mitra was appointed by the Sports Authority of India as her mediator-cum-advisor in the case at the CAS in Geneva. She speaks of the lack of ethics in the manner in which the international federations enforce gender eligibility regulations. Being one of the 10 experts on the panel supporting Caster Semenya in her case in 2019 against the IAAF regulations before the CAS, Mitra says that such regulations will definitely lead to violation of the gender rights of local women athletes by the national federations who will now enforce these regulations (Gopal, 2023; Jyoti & Ratnam, 2018). The work of athlete rights activists and those who have had traumatic experiences, as intersex athlete Ugandan runner Annet Negesa, has been to campaign against these regulations and to ensure that such women athletes do not “drop out” of sporting careers.

Extending Governance Structures

It would be appropriate to recall that it was a long struggle to bring about the passage of Title IX in 1972, a national law in the USA that prohibits discrimination in education programs or activities, including sports, on the basis of sex. This led to massive participation of young women and girls in sport with funding priority for female sports. With the passage of the Equality Act, sex has extended to include gender identity. While this has been welcomed by transgender, non-binary, and intersex athletes, it has created a divide among women's rights activists. Since 2020, numerous states across the USA have taken legislative measures that are harmful to all transgender and intersex youth (not only athletes). It raises questions of how state and society can go beyond this impasse, and extend the benefits of rights gained through feminism, to those at the margins of the gender binary.

So-Called Bathroom Bills Make a Comeback in State Legislatures

Excerpt from *States Passed a Record Number of Transgender Laws: Here is What they Say* (Hasan, 2023):

Tennessee passed one in 2021, while Alabama and Oklahoma followed in 2022. At least six states in 2023 enacted laws regulating the use of bathrooms.

Idaho's law, like many of these laws, targets school restrooms. The law says facilities that can be used by multiple people at once must be designated male or female and may be used only by members of that sex. The reason, it says, is to limit the shame and embarrassment students may feel sharing a restroom with someone of the opposite sex.

Summary

This chapter has tried to chart stories of the range of violence experienced by women and those at the margins of a gendered society in their sporting lives. The setting for this experience is the masculinist nature of the sporting field, which is a burden to women, girls, boys, and those who are of non-binary gender. While the scope has attempted to be global, there is more coverage of elite sports as they impinge on local realities. Media representations both help and hinder the larger sexualized cultures in society. Several heart-rending stories of women and young people who have surmounted trauma and scarred selves, offer inspiration to bring in structures of care and protection for athletes who enter sport for the love and joy of the experience.

Review Questions

Hypermasculinity is evident in which of the following sports?

Football

Swimming

Mountaineering

Athletics



Women journalists were prevented from entering locker rooms to report in order to:

Protect their jobs

Protect the image of baseball as a family sport

Protect the players in the locker rooms

Protect the image of the baseball coaches



In 1967, Kathrine Switzer was pushed during the:

New York Marathon

Tokyo Marathon

Berlin Marathon

Boston Marathon



Which tennis player was fined \$15,000 for refusing to speak to the press at the French Open?

Serena Williams

Monica Seles

Naomi Osaka

Simone Biles



What is the reason for the consistent exclusion of women in sport?

National pride

Gender bias

Environmental reasons

Secular values



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggenderviolence/?p=286#h5p-11>

Answer key: 1. a., 2. b., 3. d., 4. c., 5. b.

Questions for Reflection

1. How is the nature of the field of sport conducive to violent acts against the vulnerable? You could use examples from the chapter citing incidents, cases, and stories; or you can do your own research.
2. Is the gender binary an impediment in being inclusive in sport? How can it be addressed equitably?
3. Do governance structures need to be more rigid or more transparent in preventing violence and abuse in sport? Cite examples to discuss this.

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CAMPUS GENDER VIOLENCE PREVENTION THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

Whitney Archer and Elizabeth Kennedy

Abstract

Gender violence (GV) is an umbrella term describing not only types of violence that individuals may experience (i.e., stalking, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault) but also how systems create environments that allow violence to thrive. The United Nations Populations Fund states that GV “is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world; gender-based violence knows no social, economic or national boundaries. It undermines the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of survivors. And it remains shrouded in a culture of silence, supported by cultural beliefs and values that sustain, justify or dismiss it. . .” (UN Population Fund, 2023). This chapter addresses GV within the context of colleges and universities.

We anchor this chapter in our personal experiences working as feminist scholar-practitioners situated in the United States, while also being informed by global movements to end violence. Our relationship as colleagues and friends has served as a sustaining force in our efforts to address and eradicate GV. Elizabeth is a GV educator and strategist whose work and research focuses on cultivating a love ethic as a foundational framework to transform university practices and policies related to gender violence prevention efforts. Whitney is a diversity and social justice educator whose research on anti-racist feminist praxis informs their work supporting identity-based cultural resource centers.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will describe some of the historical and structural factors that tend to work against eradication of gender violence on campuses
- Students will describe the authors' combination of Brown's emergent strategies for transformation and Linder's power-conscious frameworks (PCFs), and analyze the advantages of this approach to gender violence resistance work on campuses
- Students will identify some of the benefits of collaborating/co-laboring with others to build coalitions using friendships and strategies of care to resist gender violence on campuses

Co-laboring to Resist GV on Campuses

In a US context, the 1987 scope of rape study surveying more than 6,000 college women is often noted as foundational for calling attention to the pervasiveness of GV on college campuses (Koss et al., 1987). This study found that one in four college women had experienced an attempted or completed rape, and 84% knew their attacker. In the years since, multiple independent research teams have found comparable prevalence rates (Campbell & Wasco, 2005). "For millions of students each year, college is a place of peril, a place where they encounter and then must cope with the aftermath of gender-based violence" (Marine & Lewis, 2020, p. 1).

GV on college campuses is an international issue; drawing from multiple research studies, the United Nations provides the following prevalence rates: 51% of college students in Australia reported incidents of sexual harassment and 6.9% experienced sexual assault; 76% of college women in Bangladesh faced sexual harassment; 62% of Spanish students witnessed or experienced some form of GV; and 70% of women at Cairo University in Egypt experienced sexual harassment (UN Women, 2018, p. 6). Globally, one third of women report having experienced some form of GV, and as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners (WHO, 2024). These rates are startling and overwhelming; yet we must understand the scope and prevalence of violence in order to address it.

Campus Landscape and Resources

On numerous campuses GV services have roots in women and gender equity centers, which have played a central role in advocating for institutional change and have served as hubs of feminist activism (Marine et al., 2017). Feminist activism has led to many significant advances and societal changes to address GV, including the creation of domestic violence shelters, rape crisis centers and campus-based resources and services, access to abortion, as well as law and policy changes (Marine & Lewis, 2020). Campus resources and programs that attend to GV awareness, prevention,

and response can vary greatly. In the US, federal funds are tied to compliance, and thus the presence of compliance offices is standard. Beyond compliance offices, the number and type of resources on a campus often communicates their beliefs about and approaches to GV. Common resources to look for on your campus include advocacy centers, student clubs and organizations, prevention and education programs, survivor-focused mental health services, sexual health programming, women and gender equity centers, and peer education programs. You can also look into academic programs, including women, gender and sexuality studies, for classes about GV awareness and prevention.

Learning Activity: Mapping Campus Resources for Gender & Sexual Violence Prevention

Objective: Students will explore the gender and sexual violence prevention efforts on their campus. This will familiarize them with necessary resources and highlight the importance of advocacy work on college campuses while also fostering responsibility for preventing gender and sexual violence in their community.

1. In groups of three or four students, identify the following offices, resource centers, or resources on your campus:
 - Title IX office or student legal aid office
 - Counseling services
 - Sexual assault prevention services/survivor services
 - Student groups affiliated with violence prevention
 - Emergency hotlines
 - Public safety office
 - Student health services
2. Using a map of the campus, circle key resources you have identified and write a brief description of those resources. Make sure to create your own map key that indicates any available online or phone-only resources
3. As a class, share the resources you have found with your classmates, and reflect on the importance of these resources while answering the following questions:
 - Are certain resources lacking or hard to find on your campus?
 - What barriers exist that prevent students from accessing these resources?
 - What can be done to increase awareness of gender and sexual violence on your campus?

Feminist Friendship

This chapter is grounded in our friendship as feminist practitioners in higher education working collaboratively, and sometimes subversively, to engage with our community in efforts to end GV on campus. Our work, individually and collectively, has been informed and sustained through friendships. While we have been colleagues since 2016, we did not begin intentionally working together in a meaningful way until 2018. That work began with an apology. I (Whitney) was directing the Women & Gender Center when Elizabeth was hired to assist with university prevention efforts, and while there were clear connections between our work, organizationally, prevention efforts were intentionally limited to the work of one small department. Elizabeth was discouraged from building the relationships she knew were crucial to GV prevention efforts, and the prevention efforts coordinated by the Women & Gender Center were blocked.

Following organizational restructuring, I (Elizabeth) had an opportunity to shift campus prevention efforts and knew that it had to begin by taking accountability for the detrimental impacts of the previous territorial model. I referred to this work as my “Apology Tour,” and the first stop on this tour was Whitney’s office. I acknowledged the harm and impacts that had been caused and asked Whitney what they needed to build trust. Whitney generously stated that they were willing to start at a place of trust. I (Whitney) was appreciative of Elizabeth’s vulnerability, and much of what she shared aligned with some of my own observations about the patterns of prevention work on our campus.

My offer to start at a place of trust was meeting Elizabeth with the same trust she showed me in reaching out to connect. We both believe that there is a place for everyone in prevention work, and coming together allowed us to coalesce around that shared value. This was a meaningful shift in our relationship and the starting place for transformation we’ve experienced as friends and collaborators in this work. Our shared understanding of relationships and the practice of friendship is deeply informed by adrienne maree brown’s writing on emergent strategy. She offers that “[e]mergent strategy is about shifting the way we see and feel the world and each other. If we begin to understand ourselves as practice ground for transformation, we can transform the world” (brown, 2017, p. 191).

The friendship we cultivated took time and we’ve both experienced it as being distinctly feminist. It’s personal and political. We slowed down and got to know each other beyond our roles as university administrators. We help make space for each other to vent, to laugh, to cry. We’ve encouraged and challenged one another. We’ve shared recent pics of our pups (Elizabeth) and kids (Whitney) and built a foundation that allowed for vulnerability and transformation. As Laura Rendón offers

[t]aking time to slow down and reflect is as important as spending time and energy and action to transform the institution. The work of transformation is not only about changing what’s “out there”; it’s about transforming what’s “in here,” our own internal views and assumptions (2009, p. 48).

brown (2017) refers to this mutual transformation as co-evolution and states that it is some of our deepest work. Our friendship has been a source of strength and joy for both of us in this challenging work. Anchored to our feminist orientation, we position GV on college campuses as deeply connected to and influenced by all systems of dominance.

Feminism requires us to account not just for sexism, but for the material realities created by interlocking and simultaneously experienced systems of oppression (Taylor, 2017). We can never adequately address GV if we do not account for all forms of violence and oppression. We believe that a world free from GV is possible and that there is a place for *everyone* in prevention work. Our friendship has been formative to expanding that belief and connecting it to action. In their writings on the importance of coalitions in GV prevention, Marine and Lewis taught us that the original meaning of collaboration is co-laboring, and go on to offer that collaboration

requires humility and a deep consciousness of one's own privileges, as those of differing social positions and priorities seek mutual understanding and alliance. It offers, in return, the opportunity to weave transformational efforts into the full fabric of a university, as co-laborers bring the richness of their diverse insights and locations to the change table. (2020, p. 3)

As you engage with this chapter, we invite you to reflect on what role(s) you can play to eradicate violence on your campus and to consider who your co-laborers could be.

Friendship as Central to Realizing a Power-Conscious Framework

Fellow feminist scholar Chris Linder developed a power-conscious framework (PCF) for approaching sexual violence awareness, prevention, and response on college campuses. Her framework draws on critical consciousness (Freire, 2000/1970; hooks, 1994) and intersectionality theories (Crenshaw, 1991) and links the connections between power and sexual violence. She specifically articulates how “rape as tool of power and control” (Linder, 2018, p. 9) was used by White European colonizers over Indigenous and enslaved people to instill fear and to expand both land theft and economic power. From police violence and other forms of state-sanctioned violence to perpetrators targeting minoritized people (i.e., women of color, people with disabilities, and queer and trans people) at higher rates (Linder, 2018; Marine & Lewis, 2020), patterns of domination and use of power persist.

A power-consciousness framework requires scholars, activists, and policymakers to consider the role of power in “individual, institutional, and cultural levels of interactions, policies, and practices” (Linder, 2018, p. 14). We resonate with Linder’s framework as it challenges us, and others seeking to eliminate GV, to develop strategies that attend to both the roots and the symptoms of oppression. The framework is grounded in the following three foundational assumptions: (1) power is omnipresent, (2) power and identity are inextricably linked, and (3) identity is socially constructed. Anchored in these assumptions are six action-oriented tenets:

1. Engage in critical consciousness and self-awareness
2. Consider history and context when examining issues of oppression
3. Change behaviors based on reflection and awareness
4. Name and call attention to dominant-group members’ investment in, and benefit from, systems of domination

5. Name and interrogate the role of power in individual interactions, policy development, and implementation of practice
6. Work in solidarity to address oppression

We suggest that friendship is a foundational modality through which the tenets of a PCF to address GV can be realized.

Throughout this chapter, we map a component of brown's (2017) co-evolution through friendship onto each tenet of Linder's (2018) PCF to illuminate the ways friendship has been a conduit for applying theory and enacting change. In each subsection we provide examples from our friendships and work together. The sidebars provide further examples of how each PCF tenet can be applied in day-to-day actions to prevent GV, to provide inspiration from different activists and movements.

Continual Growth

Learning and growth are foundational in the work to address GV. The phrase “continual growth” draws upon the PCF tenet to *engage in critical consciousness and self-awareness* (Linder, 2018) and brown's (2017) co-evolution through the friendship element of *self-transformation*. Linder describes engaging in critical consciousness and self-awareness as the on-going process of reflecting on who we are and how we show up in the world, as well as how that differs from those who hold different identities than we do. Self-awareness is crucial for noticing the role power plays in everyday actions and in systems. Linder makes clear that critical consciousness and self-awareness is a starting point, not the end point, of social justice work (2018, p. 26). Pairing this tenet with self-transformation, brown (2017) reminds us that we must remain open to our own change and transformation, and that as microcosms of the world, shifting the oppressive patterns within ourselves is a demonstration of the power that exists to change oppressive systems in the world. As student affairs practitioners and educators, we can easily get caught up in teaching others and forget that we too have learning to do. We align with Sara Ahmed's reminder that, “[t]o become a feminist is to remain a student” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 11).

Through our friendship, we often remind ourselves and each other we didn't always know the things that we currently know. Those reminders help us to hold space for both ours and others' learning. Our friendship helps to keep us humble and accountable. The goal of eliminating GV is a daunting task and to do it, we need as many people as possible brought into the work. Elizabeth always frames this as, “I want everyone on team prevention.” People will show up with differing levels of knowledge to a workshop or program we offer, and that is okay. Shame is a terrible teacher, and we're not interested in shaming someone for not having a base-level knowledge of how GV shows up in our communities. For example, a participant might genuinely not have known what victim-blaming is or that it is highly problematic, and they are very welcome in our spaces and programs. If we were to shame them for not having this knowledge, why would they ever join in community efforts to stop violence? Their engagement with our programs can play an important role in supporting their self-reflection and critical consciousness raising.

As friends doing this work together, we are able to help each other continually grow by helping one another see our strengths and also where there is room for us to develop. I (Elizabeth) can struggle to trust myself. This can lead me to

overthinking and over-analyzing, which ultimately makes the work even more challenging. Whitney has been helpful in strengthening my ability to trust my knowledge and critical thinking. Sometimes this has simply been an encouraging reminder of, “You’ve got this, you’re good at your job, you know what you’re doing and what you’re talking about.” It can also be Whitney holding space for me to verbalize my thinking and draw my own conclusion. Whitney’s work overlaps with GV prevention and advocacy; however, doing this work is not the primary focus of their position description.

Since doing GV work is what Elizabeth does full time and is the entirety of her position description, she has been able to help Whitney better understand our campus GV landscape, including the potholes. When navigating a campus policy failure, Elizabeth, in addition to amplifying my concern within her sphere of influence, coached me on where to push and what language to use when working with campus partners. Additionally, Elizabeth has helped me to strengthen the use of consent practices within the Women & Gender Center and other campus cultural centers. Examples include having student staff consent to the use of their name, photo, and other identifying information shared on websites and social media, giving students up front information about how photos taken at an event or program may be used, and giving them the opportunity to opt in or out of being photographed. Our experiences of co-laboring together have included a full range of emotions, from rage and discouragement to hope and joy. Through it all, our friendship has been a laboratory for learning the support of our continual growth.

“You Might Be Causing Harm If . . .” Poster Campaign at the University of Utah

Designed by student staff, these posters speak directly to their peers about common behaviors that have been “normalized” but are problematic; at a minimum are hurtful, but all too often result in violence.

Example prompts include, “You might be causing harm if...”:

- You think it was just a bad hookup and they’ll just get over it
- You ignore signs that your partner isn’t enjoying themselves
- You talk someone into having sex with you

This campaign was designed to shift the focus to “raising awareness about how to not cause harm rather than how to avoid it” (Hills & Adams, 2023, p. 3) and is an example of how to engage students in a process of critical consciousness raising (Linder, 2018) and self-transformation (brown, 2017). The posters were combined with blog posts linked with the posters via a QR code. Analytics of the scans as well as media and social media engagement point to the success of the campaign at reaching their campus community.

Context Matters: Looking Back, Noticing the Present, Changing the Future

In this section we weave together brown’s (2017) element of *pattern disrupting* with Linder’s (2018) call to *consider history and context when examining issues of oppression*. “Oppression did not happen in a vacuum and did not emerge overnight” (Linder, 2018, p. 27). Tracing the patterns of how oppression evolves and is woven into the fabric of our relationships, institutions, policies, and practices allows us to see them as just that: patterns. Patterns can be disrupted. We use this section to further contextualize GV histories and the current landscape of GV on college and university campuses.

History Matters

Across history, sexual violence has been pervasive in times of conflict and war, and as long as there has been GV there have been forms of resistance. The work to address and respond to GV has a long history, often community-based, and led by women of color. In the United States, GV is deeply entangled with the ongoing project of colonization, and Indigenous women have been at the forefront of resistance efforts. In her book, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, the first Indigenous woman to publish a book, speaks about Indigenous women experiencing sexual violence at the hands of white European men, while white European women did nothing to intervene (Winnemucca, 1883).

In 1974, the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black lesbian feminists, began meeting to confront various manifestations of oppression, including violence against women and girls. Their historic Combahee River Collective Statement introduced the concepts of interlocking systems of oppression and identity politics, and highlighted their experiences of sexism in Civil Rights organizing and racism within feminist movements (Taylor, 2017). “Thus, from the very inception of the anti-violence movement in the United States, Black women, and Black lesbians in particular, have been both central actors and challengers to the approaches and practices of the predominantly white anti-violence movement” (Incite, 2016, p. 9). As white practitioners working to address GV, we feel accountable to the women of color whose labor informs our work and is often rendered invisible within mainstream GV organizing. We also track common erasure and minimization of the violence against marginalized communities.

Context Matters

“Antiviolence work must, by definition, be conscious of and accountable to communities not historically well served, including women of color, trans and queer survivors, and those whose ability status or socioeconomic position render them less empowered in academia. Otherwise, it runs the risk of replicating the violences of academia endemic to power unconsciousness.”

(Marine & Lewis, 2020, p. 17)

Doing GV work within US higher education, we must attend to the ways legacies of violence are woven into the fabric of our campus climates and cultures. American colleges were built upon stolen Indigenous lands, often by enslaved labor, and played a significant role in the expansion of slave-based economies (Grande, 2018; Wilder, 2014). Even within the US, regional differences and campus type (i.e., community colleges, Historically Black Colleges & Universities, Predominately White Institutions) must be considered when developing strategies to address GV. Accounting for context highlights that “[t]he common driver of the work—collective resistance to patriarchal norms and a deep desire to create safer campus cultures—does not dictate sameness of practice, only sameness of resolve” (Marine & Lewis, 2020, p. 9).

Legal Matters

The legality of GV varies across the world. The first sexual violence laws in the US were property crime laws, meaning White owning-class men were the only people who could file sexual violence charges. “If their wives or daughters were raped or sexually violated, men could claim that their property had been violated” (Linder, 2018, p. 27). Globally, including within the US, many countries have societal norms that permit physical and verbal abuse; and as of 2017, 49 countries had no specific law against domestic violence, 45 countries had no legislation to address sexual harassment, and 112 countries did not criminalize marital rape (World Bank Group, 2017).

Internationally, policies and legislation for holding campuses accountable for addressing GV vary greatly in their content and strength. Several international and regional frameworks, including the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action; the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the 1994 The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (known as Belem do Para Convention); and the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (known as the Maputo Protocol) have been taken up to help address GV in public and private spaces, including educational settings (UN Women, 2018).

In the United States there are a variety of laws and regulations, both federal and state, that determine how universities craft and enact sexual misconduct policies. The most recognized is Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (2018). Title IX was signed into law on June 23, 1972. The law was introduced by Congresswoman Patsy Mink, who was motivated by her own experience of discrimination as a woman of color. Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance. The law has had large impacts on access to athletics, but applies to all aspects of education, including admissions, financial assistance, academic programs, and employment. Title IX has been crucial in promoting gender equity in education and has been taken up as a legal tool for holding institutions accountable for GV. Under Title IX, schools are required to investigate and address complaints of sexual harassment and assault. The law has been instrumental in raising awareness about the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses and has led to the development of programs and policies aimed at preventing and addressing sexual assault. It is important to know that Title IX is dynamic and its interpretation has shifted under different presidential administrations and by Supreme Court rulings. A pattern across all of these policies, frameworks, and legislation is that they fall short, and are insufficient in their ability to address GV.

Future Matters

Weaving together brown's (2017) element of *pattern disrupting* with Linder's (2018) call to *consider history and context when examining issues of oppression* provides a framework for looking back, noticing the present, and changing the future. We have helped each other notice patterns on our campus, including territorial approaches to GV, the university caring more about looking like it's doing the "right things" versus actual change, and a focus on compliance over primary prevention. In noticing these patterns, and raising them together, it is harder for the university to ignore us. Friendships are also systems and we also interrogate patterns between us and hold each other accountable to make sure we are not replicating oppressive moves, and in doing so we embody brown's (2017) reminder that "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system" (p. 53). Through our friendship we have tracked patterns and practiced new ways of being with each other.

Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIW2S) is a movement that seeks to highlight and address the disproportionate rates at which Native and Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people are stolen and killed across Canada and the US.

Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters is a moving collection of essays that centers Indigenous voices and situates personal stories of trauma and violence in relationship with colonial histories and legacies across Canada. The collection centers Indigenous responses to gendered and sexual violence and offers models for community-based grassroots activism that center Indigenous knowledges (Anderson et al., 2018).



A large protest in Montreal supporting Justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

Know Better, Do Better

Each of us are a work in progress, and change requires action. brown's (2017) notion of being *present and intentional* complements Linder's (2018) call to *change behaviors based on reflection and awareness* as they both highlight the cyclical relationship between reflection, awareness, and choice. Linder's articulation of behavior change reminds us if we do not couple awareness with action, we are part of the problem.

Our campus (Oregon State University), like many worldwide, hosts an annual Take Back the Night (TBTN) event. There are several origin stories of TBTN; some trace the roots to an 1877 event in London (Syracuse University, n.d.), other stories indicate it started in the 1970s with two independent marches responding to violence against women,

one held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, US and one in Brussels, Belgium (Gibson, 2011). From these early protests grew a movement of annual events, often including marches and survivor speak-outs that take place on college campuses and in communities around the world. A former colleague who coordinated TBTN on our campus took great pride in the number of people who attended the event, equating a large crowd with success. The crowd often included high level university administrators. The tone of the event felt curated to showcase the “good work” being done to support survivors, and left little room for critiquing our shortcomings and areas of needed improvement. Over the years, I (Whitney) had received feedback from students about their suggestions and ideas not being welcome in planning meetings and that the event felt performative.



Take Back the Night March, Duke University, November 1991

In 2019, a group of student leaders, including Women & Gender Center staff, wanted to shift TBTN, and got involved in the planning committee. They were excited about centering women of color and the inclusion of a performance by women of color student dance group, many of whom identified as survivors of GV. That excitement quickly shifted to pain and frustration upon the group being uninvited to perform based on our colleague’s perception that their dancing was “inappropriate” and “too sexual.” The students named this response as slut shaming; the act of condemning someone, usually girls and women, who are perceived to violate societal norms regarding appearance and sexuality.

Upon hearing this from students and colleagues, including one from another campus, I (Whitney) reached out to other co-laborers in this work—Kim, who worked in our survivor advocacy center, and Sahana, who coordinated survivor support in our counseling center—to seek clarity and to consult on arranging support for impacted students. We coordinated a care circle for students, and reached out to our colleague who caused harm. Bias reports were submitted and a meeting was set for the student planning committee to meet with our colleague; Sahana was invited to attend in a support role for the students. The meeting did not go well and the majority of the students withdrew from the planning committee. The former TBTN planning committee, along with additional student leaders from Women & Gender Center and other campus partners, channeled their energy to create an alternative event titled Reclaiming Resilience. The event was a beautiful gathering centering survivors of color, including queer and trans survivors, and

was grounded in healing, wholeness, and self-expression. Students created art, shared poetry, and felt held in community. The success of the Reclaiming Resilience event stands as a reminder that the impact of our programs can never be measured simply by the number of people they reach.

Responding to the harm students experienced was a moment to be *reflective* (Linder, 2018), *present and intentional* (brown, 2017), “to recognize where we have choice” (p. 195). In relationship with Kim and Sahana we listened to the students’ feedback as an opportunity to make the choice to do better. At this time, Elizabeth was still in a phase of building campus connections beyond her immediate office and during this incident she provided support to Kim, Sahana, and I (Whitney) that helped to shift collegial relationships to friendships. These friendships provided courage to start taking risks together. It also created an opportunity for self-reflection. Watching my colleague distance herself from the harm she caused taught me (Whitney) a lot about leadership and the importance of accountability. We are going to make mistakes in this work and when we do, we must be accountable. Our friendships with Kim and Sahana, who have both left our university, continue to be places of accountability for both of us.

Sarah’s Place: A Safe Place to Heal

Founders of Sarah’s Place understood that medical institutions were failing survivors who reached out for services and set out to create a more survivor-centered facility. Opening in 2016, Sarah’s Place is the first sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) center in Oregon, USA. Staffed by SANE nurses with specialized training, their facility offers private exam rooms, consultation rooms for patients and families, and a private shower. Sarah’s Place is open 24/7 and provides support, including free medical and forensic care and access to community resources (Samaritan Health Services, n.d.).

Speaking Truth to Power

The fourth tenet of Linder’s (2018) PCF is to *name and call attention to dominant group members’ investment in, and benefit from, systems of domination*; we pair this with brown’s (2017) practice of *vulnerable reflection*. In late September 2018, we watched as Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee for Judge Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Ford’s testimony detailed her sexual assault by Kavanaugh, in 1982 when they were both in high school. Ford powerfully responded to questioning for over eight hours. At stake was Kavanaugh’s potential lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court.

News media and our social media feeds were saturated with content connected to the hearing. The court of public opinion debated Ford's credibility, demonstrating the pervasiveness of rape culture and the normalization of violence. While hoping otherwise, we felt Kavanaugh's confirmation was inevitable. After all, systems in their current form privilege people with dominant identities, and people with power are commonly invested in maintenance of those systems (Linder, 2018, p. 29-30). I (Whitney) sat overwhelmed with students in the Women & Gender Center and decided to reach out to campus partners, including Elizabeth, Kim, and Sahana to see their interest in writing a collective message to share out to the campus community regarding our commitment to supporting survivors. Vulnerable reflection means reaching out to one another with honesty (brown, 2017). I reached out because I was both angry and sad; I also felt alone.

Reaching out reminded me that I wasn't alone. Together we were able to author a letter that none of us could have done on our own without professional implications. We took a risk together to speak truth to power. In our roles as student affairs professionals at a public university, our ability to speak out is limited. As we sought to get our message shared out, university officials attempted to revise it. This attempt was university powers wanting to control messaging that was designed specifically to interrupt the dominant narratives about sexual violence that were permeating the current media cycle. We wrote a letter that could have been sent from our offices any day of the year and we knew that those who needed to hear it as response to the current moment would. Our Believe Survivors message did not rely on systems to determine the validity of a survivor's experience.



Dr. Christine Blasey Ford rises to take the oath prior to her opening statement

Curiosity Creates Possibility

Beyond noticing the ways that individual people invest and benefit from systems of oppression, a PCF requires us to pay attention to the ways power operates in interactions, policies, and practices. Linder (2018) and brown's (2017) practice of *curiosity* provides us a modality through which to observe and interrogate these manifestations of power. Staying curious can create possibility.

Following a high-profile incident on our campus connected to Title IX, our university created a steering committee to conduct a comprehensive review and assessment of our GV prevention, support, and response programs and services. Ironically, as the only person on campus doing GV prevention work as my full-time job, I (Elizabeth) was not invited to participate in this committee. I was curious as to how an honest comprehensive review and assessment of prevention could be accomplished without the insight of the person tasked with this work. Sahana and I (Whitney) were invited to the steering committee and had the same curiosity. We raised the question to the group; it, along with other questions we raised, were viewed as inconvenient and were shut down.

brown (2017) states that curiosity is about asking authentic questions and believing the answers are important (p. 194). In this case, the silence with which our questions were responded to spoke volumes. It became clear that the committee was not going to result in any meaningful change. Driven by fear, the culture of compliance, which undergirded the committee, restricted our progress. The pervasiveness of compliance culture limits the ability for campuses to implement meaningful prevention education (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020). Ultimately, the group met three times and a report was submitted to university leadership.

Shifting from Compliance to Care

A common pattern we've noticed, and been punished for both noticing and naming, is campuses emphasizing compliance over care. Campuses prioritize their legal risks over dismantling systems that allow GV to thrive. Invoking brown's (2017) practice of *pattern disrupting*, we suggest an investment in primary prevention and posit a shift from compliance to care. Although the intention of laws and policies has been to provide care, it is our observation that universities have used Title IX and related policies to rigidly apply compliance and in turn create, knowingly or not, *uncaring* environments for the folk these laws are meant to protect. Whereas primary prevention shifts the focus from individuals to the community, and empowers the community to see itself as part of the solution to ending GV, and in doing so allows for the possibility to place *care* as the foundation.

The term "prevention" gets thrown around a lot in higher education, and is often equated to policy work, but this does not accurately represent the full scope of prevention work. There are three types of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention is efforts that work to address root causes of violence and seek to stop violence before it occurs. Secondary prevention is strategies that work to increase knowledge that violence is an issue and one that needs to be addressed. Tertiary prevention is how a community reacts and responds to violence, which includes campus policies and compliance efforts (Foster et al., 2019). To have comprehensive prevention efforts on our campuses, all three types of prevention must be happening. Yet it is common for tertiary efforts to be given prior-

ity. To move towards comprehensive efforts and away from compliance culture, we must move toward primary prevention.

The aim of primary prevention education is to help the community see themselves in the work and as part of the solution. Providing GV primary prevention education can help community members see and acknowledge how our systems and structures have and continue to perpetuate violence and inequitable outcomes. Primary prevention education can help get communities closer to systemic transformation and help them to consider how they can work to change the environment that allows GV to thrive.

We often see institutions run from prevention because there is fear that if the focus is on prevention, that must mean there is a problem, and institutions become consumed with liability and perceptions. Primary prevention actually offers a reframe: We know that people in all communities, including our own, experience GV—and we are dedicated to eliminating it. This may be why primary prevention work in a university context feels subversive and radical, when in reality it is just solid prevention work. Even so, these subversive and radical feelings exist, likely because universities are risk averse and do not consider primary prevention work as valuable as policy work, which helps protect liability.

I (Elizabeth) was initially upset and frankly baffled that I was not part of this group. However, at this point in my career I had watched power moves like this all the time, so although I was mad, I was not distracted by this enough to keep me from staying the course and continuing doing the work. Months after the committee wrapped up, I received an invitation to meet from the university administrator, who chaired the original steering committee, about the work I was doing. I was not going to miss my opportunity to share what was being done and what was possible if efforts were made to invest in support for prevention. I reached out to Whitney, Sahana, Kim, and our colleague Amanda to read a report I assembled to take to this meeting. The meeting was set to last for 45 minutes, but lasted for two hours, as the administrator asked me to walk him through the 16-page report. He was surprised to learn of all the work we were doing and was excited about the possibilities of what prevention could offer our campus.

Staying critical of power and remaining curious, ultimately allowed me to keep my prevention educator hat on and helped an administrator see the possibility that prevention could provide our campus. These elements continue to guide our prevention efforts and have resulted in transformative (Marine & Lewis, 2020; Marine & Nicolazzo, 2020) programming, including this year's *Imagining a World Without Sexual Violence* event coordinated by our peer educators.

The peer educators invited our campus to create a visual representation of what the world would look like without GV. They then compiled all the art and shared it with campus in a digital zine. This process invited us to consider how we too have internalized power and oppression and how we might remain curious in how we disrupt these narratives and bring new futures to life.

Through our co-laboring we've been able to mitigate the feelings of isolation and the ways we've been positioned as the problem, or confused ones when we ask critical questions or point out observations of the ways our university is failing to attend to histories and complexities of GV work. Friendship, co-laboring, and curiosity, have world-changing transformative potential.

For Survivors by Survivors

Created in 2018 at the University of Michigan, the “For Survivors by Survivors: A Healing Resource Co-Creation” art project was developed through contributions to an anonymous survey that provided an opportunity for survivors to share materials that have been helpful in their healing process. This project de-centers institutional power and knowledges and is grounded in survivors’ wisdoms and expertise. It includes books, poetry, songs, movies, and shows that survivors have found helpful in their healing processes (Sexual Assault Prevention and Awareness Center, 2018).

Solidarity: Bringing It All together

“[W]orking in solidarity with one another, taking turns, tagging out when exhausted, and holding each other accountable in social justice work are vital” (Linder, 2018, p. 32) and can only be fully realized through the application of all five practices of brown’s (2017) framework for the co-evolution through friendship (self-transformation, curiosity, vulnerable reflection, pattern disrupting, present and intentional). The following example is the coalescence of these combined frameworks: None of our best work is done in isolation; it’s done in community.

In the summer of 2020, our university hired a new president, and by November there were rumblings from his former institution that an investigation was underway related to mishandling of cases of sexual misconduct. The University was frantic. During this time, we and some of our colleagues drafted an open letter to survivors of gender violence. Our goal was to remind survivors (students, faculty, and staff) that we love them, and share where they could seek confidential support on campus. This letter spurred lots of generative conversation on our campus, which helped lead to the university community calling for the president’s resignation in the wake of this unveiled knowledge.

It is important to note that our letter was not the only thing that set positive change in motion. There were many reactionary meetings, and the reactionary nature of these meetings was underscored by causing more harm: limiting survivors’ talking time, cutting them off in the middle of testimony to the Board of Trustees, and well respected faculty coming to the defense of the president. Tensions were understandably and rightfully high. These missteps highlighted the need to have more conversations on campus about what was being done to support survivors and prevent GV. The students, faculty, and staff at the university pushed back against the reactionary and hurtful ways the institution moved in the wake of these findings. The faculty and staff held a vote of “no confidence,” and the president eventually resigned.

Stretch Yourself to Build Solidarity

Musician, cultural organizer, and change agent Bernice Johnson Reagon said, “If you’re in a coalition and you’re comfortable, you know it’s not a broad enough coalition.” The words serve as an important reminder for working to build solidarity. We must not center our own comfort, but remain open to the many unlikely collaborations that can result in change.

Summary

Michelle Gawerc writes, “By coming together and pooling resources, networks, and knowledge, coalitions allow for creating something larger and more ambitious than could be done as one group or organization . . .” (2019). It is possible to come together in similar ways within our feminist friendships, and it is our experience that these types of friendships are what can sustain us. Even after Kim and Sahana left their roles at the institution, they still co-labored with me (Elizabeth). I was applying for a job at a different institution which happened to be near where both Kim and Sahana lived. The night before my interview, Kim and Sahana met me at my hotel, brought a meal, and listened to the public presentation I would be giving the next day. They gave me important feedback—pointing out what to cut, remembering more powerful examples I could provide, and also providing me with lots of love and encouragement.

One thing that I am particularly thankful for from this night was Sahana and Kim helping me recraft my personal statement. They shared honestly that they did not think it was strong enough or fully captured how I approach prevention work. They asked me some probing questions, Sahana typed what I was saying, and they helped me distill it to a statement that accurately represents how I move in this work. It is the personal statement that I still use and holds tremendous value to me because it is not just a reflection of me, but a reflection of how people who speak truth into my life and witness me move in the work and know that they will hold me accountable to how I claim to move.

Postscript

The stories and examples shared across this chapter demonstrate our commitments to solidarity and coalition building in the service of eradicating GV. We hope you see the transformative power of this work and choose to join us in it.

Attributed to a lecture she gave at Southern Illinois University, the following words from Angela Davis continually inspire us to continue to stay in this work, “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.” We hope that you resist the urgency to run full speed ahead and slow down to consider how you might like to join this work or continue the work you are currently doing to end GV. We have provided you with some prompts below to consider how you might employ friendship to actualize a PCF of attending to GV. Maybe grab some snacks and your friends and ponder these prompts together.

- What are some ways you see friendship as a form of resistance to oppression?
- How might you start the process of unlearning harmful and false narratives about GV?
- Who could hold you accountable to this unlearning?
- Who are or could be your co-laborers in this work?
- Are there daily practices that you can implement to resist oppression?
- What inspires you to do anti-oppression work?
- How might you provide encouragement and support to your co-laborers/friends?

We are so thankful you are here doing this work with us.

In Friendship,

Whitney & Elizabeth

Review Questions

The significance of “co-laboring” is that (select all that apply):

- It helps to build coalitions, which can aid in prevention of gender violence and other forms of oppression
- It encourages reflection on one’s own privileges and priorities
- It makes members aware of the viewpoints and social positions of others
- It can mitigate feelings of isolation, provide support, and enrich one’s relationships



Which of the following is not one of the action-oriented tenets of Linder’s power-conscious framework (PCF)

- Consider history and context when examining issues of oppression
- Focus on calling attention to instances of institutional injustice
- Name and call attention to dominant-group members’ investment in, and benefit from, systems of domination
- Name and interrogate the role of power in individual interactions, policy development, and implementation of practice
- Work in solidarity to address oppression



Which of the following is an example of brown’s “pattern disrupting” (select all that apply)?

- Interrupting a dominant speaker when other people are waiting to speak
- Advocating for a focus on caring rather than compliance in cases of gender
- Visualize what the world would look like without gender violence
- Focus on tertiary prevention rather than primary prevention



What is the definition of “primary prevention”?

- Campus policies and compliance efforts to respond to gender violence
- A focus on institutions avoiding legal risks/liability
- Helping communities transform their systems and prevent violence in the first place
- Asking the difficult questions before they can be shut down
- Making sure Title IX is enforced



The University of Utah’s “You might be causing harm if . . .” poster campaign incorporated which of brown’s tenets of a power-conscious framework (PCF) (select all that apply)?

- Naming the role of power in individual interactions
- Calling attention to dominant-group members’ benefit from systems of domination
- Engage in critical consciousness and self-awareness
- Changing behaviors based on reflection and awareness



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=283#h5p-12>

Answer key: 1. all of the above, 2. b., 3. b. and c., 4. c., 5. all of the above

Questions for Reflection

1. How does gender violence intersect with other forms of discrimination (e.g., racial, economic, LGBTQIA+ identity), and how should colleges address these intersections in prevention efforts?
2. How does college culture, including party culture, contribute to or perpetuate gender violence, and what can be done to challenge these norms? In what ways can gender violence undermine the academic, social, and emotional well-being of students, especially survivors?
3. What are some ways that co-laboring with others can strengthen individuals as well as the larger movement to eradicate gender violence on campuses? Will you use any of the prompts given above to aid you in your own work against gender violence?

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SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

Jayamala Mayilsamy and Kamalaveni Veni

Abstract

Interpersonal violence is multidimensional. This chapter covers fundamental concepts, categories of interpersonal violence, the stages of the cycle of violence, data on intimate partner violence, and protective factors against self-harm and interpersonal violence. The explanation focuses on many types of interpersonal violence, such as family violence, community violence, and violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people, emphasizing the various stages in the cycle of violence. Furthermore, it investigates global viewpoints on interpersonal violence, including polygamy, violence against children, and female genital mutilation in various cultures and countries. The chapter emphasizes the need for intervention and support services in addressing interpersonal violence and provides evidence-based prevention techniques.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will elucidate the various forms and manifestations of interpersonal violence, including its occurrence in domestic and community settings
- Students will analyze the cyclical nature of interpersonal violence, identifying the stages involved and recognizing the importance of intervention and support services for victims
- Students will evaluate global perspectives on interpersonal violence, considering cultural contexts and diverse manifestations such as polygamy, violence against children, and female genital mutilation, to develop insights into its impact and the necessity for comprehensive prevention strategies

The Social and Cultural Dimensions of Interpersonal Violence

Violence in general is defined as the deliberate use of force or authority to cause harm. The World Health Organization (WHO Global Consultation on Violence and Health, 1996) describes violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation.” Thus, violence is *interpersonal*, which involves the intentional use of physical force or power against other persons by an individual or small group of individuals. The deployment and regulation of violence are social processes, and violence itself is socially patterned and embedded in inequalities in institutions and regimes (Walby, 2009, 2012).

Hence, interpersonal violence seems to be socially, culturally, and historically a phenomenon that in one way or another reflects social conditions, attitudes, conceptions, and changes, and that is manifested in human interactions. These social, historical, and cultural dimensions of violence give interpersonal violence its meaning and power (Husso et al., 2017). Interpersonal violence is a global social and health problem in higher- and lower-income countries alike (Hearn, 2013; Ray, 2011). It is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that involves violation, suffering, trauma, and loss. Interpersonal violence may be physical, sexual, or psychological (also called emotional violence), and it may involve deprivation and neglect. Interpersonal violence has many names. Some of these, such as child abuse, refer to the age of the victim and perpetrator. Some refer to behavioral criteria; that is, to specific acts such as rape, stalking, or genital mutilation; whereas others reflect attempts to capture broad concepts, such as intimate partner violence and violence against women. Interpersonal violence has also been categorized into two specific forms: family/partner violence and community violence, where each is further classified by the type of target (Krug et al., 2002).

- *Family or partner violence* refers to violence within the family or between intimate partners (of all gender identities and sexual orientations) occurring between residences within one single location. It includes child maltreatment, dating and intimate partner violence (IPV), and elder maltreatment.
- *Community violence* occurs among individuals who are not related by family ties but who may know each other. It includes youth violence, bullying, assault, rape or sexual assault by acquaintances or strangers, and violence that occurs in institutional settings such as schools, workplaces, and prisons. Community violence may be perpetrated on women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people by people of any gender identity or sexual orientation; but is most often done by men.

Interpersonal violence encompasses a spectrum of harmful behaviors occurring between individuals, spanning physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological realms. Thus, interpersonal violence happening both at home and in the community can manifest in multiple ways, including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, verbal, financial, legal, medical coercion, and technological forms, such as digital stalking. These forms of violence can occur in many settings, including families, communities, schools, workplaces, and online spaces. Each type can have severe physical, emotional, and social consequences, necessitating different interventions and support services.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (n.d.) states that “community violence is exposure to intentional acts of interpersonal violence committed in public areas by individuals who are not intimately related to the victim.” Common types of community violence that affect youth include individual and group conflicts (e.g., bullying, fights among gangs and other groups, shootings in public areas such as schools and communities, civil wars in foreign countries or “war-like” conditions in US cities, and spontaneous or terrorist attacks). Although people can anticipate some types of traumatic events, community violence can also happen suddenly and without warning. Consequently, youth and families who live with community violence often have heightened fears that harm could come at any time; they experience the world as unsafe and terrifying. In addition, although some types of trauma are accidental, community violence is an intentional attempt to hurt one or more people; and includes homicides, sexual assaults, robberies, and weapons attacks (e.g., bats, knives, guns).

The Cycle of Interpersonal Violence

Interpersonal violence often follows a cyclical pattern or progression, which can be divided into various stages. Developed by psychologist Lenore Walker and detailed in her book *The Battered Woman*, published in 1979, the cycle of violence serves as a tool to clarify the cyclical nature of battering and its impact on victims. This model aids in understanding abusive relationships and sheds light on why individuals may stay in such relationships despite experiencing abuse, as well as why abusers exhibit dramatic changes in behavior.

The typical stages of interpersonal violence involve a cyclical pattern that includes tension-building, incident of acute violence, reconciliation or “honeymoon,” calming or tension-reduction, and escalation phases. Here’s a breakdown of each stage:

1. *Tension-Building Phase:* This phase is characterized by increasing tension and stress within the relationship. Communication may deteriorate, and minor conflicts may arise more frequently. The perpetrator may become more controlling or irritable, while the victim(s) may attempt to placate the perpetrator to prevent escalation (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).
2. *Incident or Acute Phase:* This is when the actual violent incident occurs, which can involve physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse directed towards the victim(s). The violence may be sudden and intense, or escalate gradually over time. The perpetrator may exhibit a loss of control and may justify their actions or blame the victim(s) (Walker, 1979).
3. *Reconciliation or Honeymoon Phase:* After the violent incident, there may be a period of calm and remorse. The perpetrator may apologize, show affection, or promise to change their behavior. The victim(s) may feel relief or hope that the violence will not recur (Walker, 1979).
4. *Calming or Tension-Reduction Phase:* During this phase, both the victim and perpetrator may attempt to minimize the impact of the violence and restore normalcy. The relationship may temporarily stabilize, and tension may decrease. However, underlying issues remain unresolved, setting the stage for future violence (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).
5. *Escalation:* If underlying issues are not addressed, the cycle of violence may escalate, leading to more frequent

and severe incidents. The tension-building phase may become shorter, and the violence may become more intense, perpetuating the cycle (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988).

It is important to note that these stages of interpersonal violence do not necessarily occur in a linear order, and their severity and duration can vary depending on the circumstances. While many survivors of violence can identify with this cycle, it is important to recognize that each person's experience with violence is unique, and the duration of each phase can range from moments to years. Over time, the cycle may speed up, and certain stages, such as the joyful phase, may be bypassed. Leaving an abusive relationship can be extremely difficult and dangerous in some situations, highlighting the significance of planning.

Interpersonal Violence Against Women, Girls, and LGBTQIA+ People

Interpersonal violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people manifests in different forms. These include domestic violence or intimate partner violence; non-partner sexual violence; non-partner violence of other types; sexual exploitation and trafficking; harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); and child, early, and forced marriage.

Domestic Violence or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

According to the UN, domestic abuse, also called “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence,” can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse can consist of physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Domestic violence can happen to anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion, class, or gender. It can occur within a range of relationships, including couples who are married, living together, or dating. Domestic violence affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. *Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, or class.* Victims of domestic abuse may also include a child or other relative, or any other household member.

Domestic violence is typically manifested as a pattern of abusive behavior toward an intimate partner in a dating or family relationship, where the abuser exerts power and control over the victim. WHO also emphasizes that abuse is a form of interpersonal violence, involving actions aimed at harming, intimidating, manipulating, or exploiting another individual. This behavior often stems from a desire to exert power and control, perpetuated through coercive and violent means.

[The Power and Control Wheel](#), crafted by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, MN, proves invaluable in comprehending the overarching pattern of abusive and violent behaviors employed by an abuser to establish and sustain control over their partner or any other household victim. Frequently, alongside one or more violent inci-

dents, a range of these additional forms of abuse may occur. Although less overt, they firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control within the relationship.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Across Countries

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies four types of intimate partner violence (IPV): physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression. IPV significantly impacts millions of individuals in the United States (and worldwide) annually. Data derived from the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) indicates the following:

- Approximately 41% of women and 26% of men have encountered sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime and have reported experiencing related impacts.
- Over 61 million women and 53 million men have been subjected to psychological aggression by an intimate partner over the course of their lifetime (CDC, 2024).

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 894 gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer men through ACON's social media pages, examined intimate partner violence (IPV) experiences, attitudes, and bystander intervention (2019). Nearly 62% reported experiencing physical, verbal, or emotional abuse in a relationship, with 26% facing abuse in the past year. Most of them disclosed their experiences to friends (35%), counselors (18%), or family (17%), while another 17% of the sufferers remained silent. Among 328 witnesses of IPV, 41% intervened verbally, 14% physically, and 13% sought help, whereas 13% did not intervene and 23% were uncertain about how to respond.

What is Domestic Violence in India?

Domestic violence in India, as per the Domestic Violence Act, refers to any act that causes harm or injury to a woman within a domestic relationship.

This includes various forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and financial abuse. The scope of domestic violence under the Domestic Violence Act encompasses both actual instances of abuse and threats of abuse.

Furthermore, domestic violence in India extends to any harassment resulting from illegal dowry demands made on the woman or her family. The Domestic Violence Act primarily safeguards wives or female live-in partners from domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands or male live-in partners, as well as their families. It's crucial for women facing such issues to seek legal advice from professional lawyers for proper guidance and support (Sharma, n.d.).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence reports surged across the United States, escalating from 21% to 35% (Campbell, 2020). The implementation of stay-at-home orders, aimed at curbing the spread of the virus, inadvertently contributed to heightened societal stressors. These stressors, compounded by the global pandemic, led to increased levels of illicit drug and alcohol use, job loss, and social isolation (Campbell, 2020). Consequently, individuals faced elevated levels of stress, which often manifested as nonphysical forms of abuse, including psychological, emotional, economic, and technological abuse. Unfortunately, these instances frequently escalated into physical violence. Marginalized communities, particularly Black women and Latinas, were disproportionately affected by these circumstances (Machado et al., 2021).

In a recent study by Zhou et al. (2024), the global burden of self-harm and interpersonal violence, along with influencing factors, was comprehensively analyzed from 1990 to 2019 using data from the Global Burden of Disease Study. The study sheds light on the trends and factors influencing the burden of these forms of violence over the past three decades. Specifically, the authors explore the incidence rates, mortality, Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), and various risk factors associated with self-harm and interpersonal violence. Specific risk factors associated with self-harm included alcohol use, high temperature, and drug use; and alcohol use, intimate partner violence, and high temperature were linked to interpersonal violence. Interestingly, *low* temperature emerged as a common protective factor against both self-harm and interpersonal violence. This research provides valuable insights into understanding and addressing the complex dynamics of violence on a global scale.

Gender Violence in the Indian Film “The Great Indian Kitchen”

The Great Indian Kitchen (Baby, 2021) is a Malayalam-language film that gained attention for its portrayal of the everyday life of an Indian woman dealing with patriarchy and gender roles within a traditional household.

The movie doesn't depict physical violence in the conventional sense; rather, it does exhibit other forms of interpersonal violence, primarily in the form of emotional and psychological abuse.

Gender-based expectations: The film showcases the protagonist, a newly wed woman, being subjected to rigid gender-based expectations. She is constantly pressured to conform to traditional roles assigned to women, such as cooking, cleaning, and serving the family; while her husband and in-laws do little to help or appreciate her efforts. This imposition of roles without regard for her aspirations or well-being can be seen as a form of emotional violence.

Lack of autonomy: The woman's autonomy and agency (capacity to act) are consistently undermined by her husband and in-laws. She is not allowed to make decisions regarding her own life, and her desires and opinions are dismissed or ignored. This restriction of her autonomy is a form of psychological violence, as it erodes her sense of self-worth and control over her own life.

Isolation and control: The protagonist is isolated from the outside world and controlled within the confines of her marital home. She is not allowed to pursue her interests or maintain relationships outside of her family, further limiting her sense of freedom and independence. This isolation and control exerted over her can be viewed as a form of emotional abuse.

Emotional manipulation: Throughout the film, the woman is subjected to emotional manipulation by her husband and in-laws, who use guilt, coercion, and emotional blackmail to maintain control over her. This manipulation is a subtle yet potent form of interpersonal violence, as it undermines her emotional well-being and reinforces the power dynamics within the household.

Overall, while *The Great Indian Kitchen* may not feature explicit physical violence, it effectively portrays the insidious nature of interpersonal violence through its depiction of emotional and psychological abuse within a traditional Indian household.

For Further Learning: Read up on some of the controversies surrounding this film, including how and when it was made available on streaming services. Visit several of the platforms/services offering this movie. Note the adjectives and other vocabulary used to describe the plot and characters, and compare how the different platforms categorize the film. Do you notice any patterns or differences?

Insights into the Effects of Intimate Partner Violence

Patra et al. (2018) identified several effects of intimate partner violence in their study, *Intimate Partner Violence: Wounds are Deeper*. These effects include serious or fatal injuries, hearing or vision loss, lasting physical damage, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancies; mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders; as well as physical health issues like heart problems, digestive difficulties, reproductive issues, nervous system conditions, and muscle and bone disorders. Additionally, intimate partner violence can lead to low self-esteem; feelings of being unwanted, powerless, hopeless, and ashamed; trust issues; difficulty with relationships; and engaging in risky behaviors. Such violence can also impede functioning at work or school. Domestic abuse, encompassing mental, physical, economic, and/or sexual forms, tends to escalate in frequency and severity and may result in serious physical injury or even death.



A street theater performance on domestic violence at Bridge Market plaza, Chandigarh, India

Polygyny and Spousal Violence

Polygamy refers to the practice of being married to multiple spouses simultaneously; including polygyny, where a man has multiple wives; and polyandry, where a woman has multiple husbands. Although widely prohibited globally, certain societies have historically and culturally accepted polygamous marriages.

Challenges and Controversies

There are many legal, social, and ethical challenges surrounding polygamy. These include:

- Criminalization versus personal law rights for Muslims
- Debate around Constitutional rights to religion versus gender equality
- Social evils like bride trafficking and child marriages arising from polygamy
- Opposition to reforms from religious conservatives

Although both polygyny (multiple female spouses) and polyandry (multiple male spouses) do occur, polyandry is quite rare and usually occurs only in very specific circumstances. Most polygamous marriages consist of one man and two or more women. Research suggests that polygamous (polygynous) marriages have negative implications for the psychological and social well-being of the women and children involved. Discriminatory behavior from husbands and unequal treatment among wives often lead to various mental health issues such as jealousy, diminished marital satisfaction, unhealthy competition, and a lack of trust. In certain countries like India, Iran, Iraq, Bangladesh, Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, and Kuwait, women have the option to include clauses prohibiting polygyny in marriage

contracts. However, in Pakistan and Iran, only the consent of the first wife is required, which must be presented in court as evidence for marrying a second wife. Over time, societal acceptance of polygamy has increased, with women gradually adapting to the practice. The sharing of domestic responsibilities among co-wives has contributed to reducing possessiveness and fostering acceptance among partners (Naseer et al., 2021).

Legal Status of Polygamy Across Countries

In developed countries such as the USA, Canada, and across Europe; polygamy is unambiguously prohibited by law. Similarly, many developing nations like China, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar also do not permit polygamous marriages. However, in countries with predominant Muslim populations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Malaysia, polygyny (the practice of having multiple wives) is allowed for Muslim men under religious laws. India also permits polygamous marriages, particularly for Muslims. Furthermore, Sub-Saharan African nations often allow customary polygamous marriages, reflecting cultural traditions and practices.



A polygamous wedding in Nigeria, with a man marrying a third wife

Learning Activity: Global Resistance to Gender Violence

Objective: Students will utilize the knowledge they have attained from this chapter to understand the importance of global resistance efforts to stop various forms of gender violence. Students will explore how global movements have galvanized communities to influence social and structural change to prevent gender violence.

1. Divide the class into four groups, each choosing an organization or activist movement from anywhere in the world that has a particular focus on gender violence (example topics below).
 - #MeToo: the origin of the movement, global impact, and the role of social media movements in effective global activist organizing.
 - One Billion Rising: a global movement to end violence against women and the connection between art as a form of protest.
 - TransLatin@ Coalition: research the organization's mission to improve the experiences of immigrant and migrant transgender Latina women in the United States.
 - Adal Aur Sehat Project: research the impact of legal aid for survivors of gender violence in Pakistan.
2. Identify the following information about the organization or movement you are studying:
 - Key goals: What is the movement or organization's mission or goal?
 - Key strategies: How does the movement resist or address gender violence (e.g., awareness campaigns, policy change, legal reforms, community mobilization)?
 - Major achievements: What progress has been made (e.g., changes in law, shifts in public opinion, changes in policy)?
 - Challenges: What challenges has the movement faced (e.g., resistance, backlash, political challenges)?
 - Global impact: How has the organization or movement had an international impact?
3. Share your findings with the class.

Violence Against Children

Information from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) describes the various types of violence against children, emphasizing that it can happen both at home and in the community. The majority of violence against children falls into at least one of the six categories of interpersonal violence listed below, which occur at various phases of a child's development. When aimed towards girls or boys because of their biological sex or gender identity, any of these sorts of abuse can be considered gender violence.

- *Maltreatment (including violent punishment)* includes physical, sexual, and psychological/emotional aggression, as well as neglect of infants, children, and adolescents by parents, carers, and other authority, most commonly at home but also in schools and orphanages.
- *Bullying (includes cyberbullying)* is defined as unwelcome aggressive behavior by another child or group of children who are not siblings or romantically involved with the victim. It entails recurrent physical, psychological, or social injury and is frequently perpetrated in schools and other gathering places for children, as well as online.
- *Youth violence* is concentrated among children and young adults aged 10 to 29 years, occurs most often in community settings between acquaintances and strangers, includes bullying and physical assault with or without weapons (such as guns and knives), and may involve gang violence.
- *Intimate partner violence (or domestic violence)* involves physical, sexual and/or emotional violence by an intimate partner or ex-partner. Although males can also be victims, intimate partner violence disproportionately affects females and LGBTQIA+ people. It commonly occurs against girls within child marriages and early/forced marriages. Among romantically involved but unmarried adolescents it is sometimes called “dating violence.”
- *Sexual violence* includes non-consensual completed or attempted sexual contact and acts of a sexual nature not involving contact (such as voyeurism or sexual harassment); acts of sexual trafficking committed against someone who is unable to consent or refuse; and online exploitation.
- *Emotional or psychological violence* includes restricting a child's movements, denigration (“put-downs”), ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment.

Violence against children can be triggered by a variety of factors, such as parents who are young or have poor parenting skills, absence of social supports, economic challenges, and many others. Evans et al. (2014) described some of the potential risk factors in the family, community, society, parenthood, and childhood.

Impacts of Violence Against Children

WHO (2022) stated that violence against children has lifelong impacts on the health and well-being of children, families, communities, and nations. Violence against children can:

- *Result in death.* Homicide, which often involves weapons such as knives and firearms, is among the top four

causes of death in adolescents, with boys comprising over 80% of victims and perpetrators.

- *Lead to severe injuries.* For every homicide, there are hundreds of (predominantly male) victims of youth violence who sustain injuries because of physical fighting and assault.
- *Impair brain and nervous system development.* Exposure to violence at an early age can impair brain development and damage other parts of the nervous system, as well as the endocrine, circulatory, musculoskeletal, reproductive, respiratory, and immune systems, with lifelong consequences. As such, violence against children can negatively affect cognitive development and result in educational and vocational underachievement.
- *Result in negative coping and health risk behaviors.* Children exposed to violence and other adversities are substantially more likely to smoke, misuse alcohol and drugs, and engage in high-risk sexual behavior. They also have higher rates of anxiety, depression, other mental health problems, and suicide.
- *Lead to unintended pregnancies,* induced abortions, gynecological problems, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.
- *Contribute to a wide range of non-communicable diseases* as children grow older. The increased risk for cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and other health conditions is largely due to the negative coping and health risk behaviors associated with violence.
- *Impact opportunities and future generations.* Children exposed to violence and other adversities are more likely to drop out of school, have difficulty finding and keeping a job; and are at heightened risk for later victimization and/or perpetration of interpersonal and self-directed violence, by which violence against children can affect the next generation.

Efforts Taken to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children

Efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children require a systematic approach that addresses risk and protective factors across different levels: individual, relationship, community, and society. Under the guidance of the World Health Organization (WHO), a consortium of 10 international agencies has developed an evidence-based technical package known as *INSPIRE: Seven strategies for ending violence against children*. This package is designed to assist countries and communities in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 16.2, which focuses on ending violence against children (WHO, 2016b).

Each letter of the word “INSPIRE” represents one of the strategies, many of which have demonstrated preventive effects across various types of violence; and have additional benefits in areas such as mental health, education, and crime reduction. The seven strategies include:

1. *Implementation and enforcement of laws,* such as prohibiting violent discipline and restricting access to alcohol and firearms
2. *Norms and values changes,* including efforts to shift norms condoning the sexual abuse of girls or aggressive behavior among boys
3. *Creating safe environments,* which involves identifying and addressing local causes of violence in “hot spots”

through interventions like problem-oriented policing

4. *Providing parental and caregiver support*, such as offering parent training to young, first-time parents
5. *Income and economic strengthening*, including initiatives like microfinance and gender equity training
6. *Provision of response services*, ensuring that children exposed to violence can access emergency care and receive appropriate psychosocial support
7. *Education and life skills development*, which involves ensuring that children attend school and providing them with life and social skills training



Protesting child marriage/sexual violence against children (back sign reads "Life imprisonment for child rapist")

In May 2016, the World Health Assembly adopted a resolution endorsing the first-ever World Health Organization (WHO) *Global Plan of Action on Strengthening the Role of the Health System within a National Multisectoral Response to Address Interpersonal Violence; particularly against women and girls, and against children*. According to this plan, WHO (2016a), in collaboration with Member States and other partners, is committed to:

- Monitoring the global magnitude and characteristics of violence against children, and supporting countries' efforts to document and measure such violence
- Maintaining an electronic information system that synthesizes scientific data on the burden, risk factors, and consequences of violence against children, as well as evidence for its preventability
- Developing and disseminating evidence-based technical guidance documents, norms, and standards for preventing and responding to violence against children

- Regularly publishing global status reports on country efforts to address violence against children; encompassing national policies, action plans, laws, prevention programs, and response services
- Supporting countries and partners in implementing evidence-based prevention and response strategies, including those outlined in INSPIRE
- Collaborating with international agencies and organizations to reduce and eliminate violence against children globally; through initiatives such as the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, Together for Girls, and the Violence Prevention Alliance.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025), FGM encompasses “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” This dangerous practice has no health benefits for girls and women and can result in serious consequences, such as heavy bleeding, urinary troubles, cysts, infections, birthing complications, and an increased chance of neonatal death. FGM is widely recognized as a violation of girls’ and women’s human rights, highlighting deep-seated gender inequality and being an extreme form of discrimination against females. It is typically performed on adolescents by traditional practitioners, and represents a violation of their rights. Furthermore, FGM breaches individuals’ rights to health, safety, and bodily integrity; as well as their entitlement to freedom from torture and cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. In cases where the procedure results in death, it infringes upon the right to life.

In its 2024 statistical report, UNICEF stated that FGM is recognized as a violation of girls’ and women’s human rights. It has affected over 230 million individuals worldwide. The majority, with over 144 million cases, are found in Africa; followed by over 80 million in Asia; and an additional six million in the Middle East. Additionally, one to two million are impacted in smaller practicing communities and migration destination countries across the globe. A recent report by the Orchid Project (2023) provides a clear picture of how common female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is in Ethiopia. 65.2% of Ethiopian women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone the practice. Data from the Demographic and Health Surveys emphasize the need for focused efforts to challenge this deeply embedded practice. 65% of FGM/C practices in Ethiopia involve nicking or cutting the genitals, and 35% involve a cut that removes a small amount of flesh. Both types of cutting endanger girls’ and women’s health and wellbeing.

The WHO has classified FGM into four different types:

1. *Clitoridectomy*. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the external and visible part of the clitoris) and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoral glans).
2. *Excision*. Partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without removal of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).
3. *Infibulation*. This involves the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans.

4. *Other*. Encompasses all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, such as pricking, piercing, incising, scraping, and cauterizing the genital area.

FGM is often performed in particular social groups by traditional circumcisers or cutters with no medical training. In some nations, a medical practitioner may do this procedure. Anesthesia and antiseptics are rarely used, and FGM is frequently performed using knives, scissors, scalpels, bits of glass, or razor blades. FGM often happens against a girl's will and without her consent. There are no health benefits to FGM, and it can cause serious harm. The health consequences of FGM (WHO, 2020) are:

- Death
- Severe pain and shock
- Broken limbs from being held down
- Injury to adjacent tissues
- Urine retention
- Increased risk of HIV and AIDS
- Uterine, vaginal, and pelvic infections
- Cysts and neuromas (tumors)
- Increased risk of fistula (an abnormal opening or tear between the vagina and the bladder or rectum)
- Complications in childbirth
- Depression and post-natal depression
- Psychosexual problems
- Pregnancy and childbirth issues
- Sexual dysfunction
- Difficulties in menstruation
- Trauma and flashbacks
- Infertility

Motivations Behind FGM

The reasons FGM is practiced today are a mix of cultural, religious, and social factors within families and communities. For example, in Guinea, FGM is practiced almost universally, with a national prevalence of 95 to 97% (Institute National de la Statistique & ICF, 2019). The main reasons given by Guineans to justify the practice are respect for the custom handed down by their ancestors, and controlling women's sexuality before and during marriage to favor the marriageability of girls and preserve family honor (Barry, 2015, 2019). However, this very high FGM prevalence may not be an accurate reflection of the strength of this apparent attitude (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018), as more than a

third (37%) of Guinean women (17% of women living in Conakry) are of the opinion that the FGM practice should end (Barry, 2019). In India, FGM is practiced by the Dawoodi Bohra, a sect of Shia Islam with one million members in India (Nanda & Ramani, 2022). Known as *khatna*, *khafz*, and *khafd*, the procedure is performed on six- or seven-year-old girls and involves the total or partial removal of the clitoral hood. The spiritual leader of the Dawoodi Bohra, Mufaddal Saifuddin, clarified that while “religious books, written over a thousand years ago, specify the requirements for both males and females as acts of religious purity,” the Bohras must “respect the law of the land” and refrain from carrying out *Islamic female circumcision* in countries where it is prohibited. Other Bohra sects, including the Sulemani Bohras and the Alavi Bohras, as well as some Sunni communities in Kerala, India, are reported as practicing FGM.

According to WHO (2025), the reasons for FGM include:

- Where FGM is a social convention, the social pressure to conform is a strong motivation to continue the practice
- FGM is often considered a necessary part of raising a girl properly and preparing her for marriage/adulthood
- FGM is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered proper sexual behavior
- FGM is associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty
- Although no religious scripts prescribe (require) the practices, practitioners often believe the practice has religious support. Religious leaders take varying positions with regard to FGM: some promote it, some consider it irrelevant, and others contribute to its elimination
- Local structures of power and authority can continue upholding the practice
- FGM is often considered a cultural tradition, which is often used as an argument for its continuation

A Holistic Approach to Combat Female Genital Mutilation

WHO has played a pivotal role in promoting a comprehensive health sector response to prevent FGM and provide care for affected persons. This involves developing guidance and resources for healthcare workers to address FGM, manage its complications, and support prevention efforts. Furthermore, WHO assists countries in adapting and implementing these resources to suit their specific contexts. Additionally, WHO contributes to the body of evidence aimed at enhancing understanding of FGM and identifying effective strategies to combat this harmful practice. In line with its commitment to addressing FGM, WHO has collaborated with partner organizations to devise a global strategy aimed at countering the medicalization of FGM (medicalization refers to categorizing a human condition—such as possessing normal female genitalia—as an issue or problem needing “treatment”). This strategy underscores the organization’s ongoing support to countries in implementing measures to combat FGM and safeguard the health and well-being of affected individuals.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that over four million girls are at risk of FGM each year. It is predicted that by 2030, nearly one in three girls worldwide will be born in the 31 countries where FGM is most prevalent, putting 68 million girls at risk. If global efforts are not significantly scaled up, the number of girls and

women undergoing FGM will be higher in 2030 than it is today (UN Population Fund, 2025). Understanding the fact that global efforts have accelerated, progress is being made to eliminate FGM. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, n.d.) and UNFPA jointly lead the world's largest program. UNICEF also works with governments at the national and regional levels to support the development of policies focusing on outlawing and ending FGM. For girls at risk of FGM, as well as FGM survivors, UNICEF also provides access to medical and psychological care and supports health workers who provide such treatment.

Summary

Interpersonal violence, characterized by deliberate physical force or power to cause harm, manifests in various forms transcending geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries. It affects individuals across ages, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, and backgrounds within familial, intimate, communal, and institutional settings. The typologies of violence, encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse, underscore perpetrators' pursuit of power and control, exploiting societal norms. Understanding the cyclic nature of interpersonal violence, marked by tension, abuse, and reconciliation phases, is essential for intervention. Substance abuse, societal stressors, and systemic inequalities contribute to its prevalence, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities such as women, LGBTQIA+ people, those living in poverty, and people of color, who face barriers in seeking help. Addressing interpersonal violence necessitates a holistic approach tackling the root causes, challenging harmful attitudes, and providing support. Education, advocacy, and policy reforms are vital in fostering safer environments and empowering individuals to break free. Ultimately, ending interpersonal violence requires collective action to promote equality, respect, and dignity for all, fostering a future free from abuse and violence.

Review Questions

What is the definition of violence, according to the World Health Organization?

- Accidental harm
- Unintentional use of force
- Intentional use of physical force or power
- Verbal disagreement



Which of the following is **not** a type of interpersonal violence?

- Bullying
- Elder abuse
- Cyberbullying
- Natural disasters



According to the cycle of violence, what phase follows the Reconciliation or Honeymoon phase?

- Calming or Tension-Reduction Phase
- Escalation
- Incident or Acute Phase
- Tension-Building Phase



What percentage of women and men have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner over their lifetime, according to the CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)?

- Approximately 25%
- Over 61 million women and 53 million men
- Less than 10%
- About 50%



According to a study by Zhou et al. (2024), what factor emerged as a common protective factor against both self-harm and interpersonal violence?

- High temperature
- Alcohol use
- Low temperature
- Drug use



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=288#h5p-13>

Answer key: 1. c., 2. d., 3. a., 4. b., 5. c.

Questions for Reflection

1. What policies exist in your country to protect women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals, and are they effective?
2. How can you support friends or family members who might be experiencing violence?
3. How do media and pop culture influence your perceptions of violence against marginalized groups?
4. How does violence affect a child's mental health and emotional well-being?
5. What role does WHO play in working with governments, NGOs, and communities to eliminate FGM?

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GENDER VIOLENCE AND RELIGION

Shannon Garvin

Abstract

As both an inherited and constructed set of beliefs to understand the world, religion presents unique challenges when addressing the issue of violence. Patriarchy and religion meld to oppress women, children, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minoritized groups. While people want to believe in the divine to find comfort and meaning in life, they also attempt to control it to exert their own human power. Religion is used both to justify and to resist systems of oppression.

This chapter explores the ways in which we can resist violence against women and other minorities by reaching deeper into religious beliefs to explore the shared core of the world's religions which honor humanity and call for compassion and service to others. The wide religious backgrounds of Nobel Peace Prize winners and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also offer glimpses of ways we can tap our common humanity and shared core religious beliefs to do good and resist violence.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will describe several ways religions both justify oppression against minoritized groups and enable resistance through common meaning-making
- Students will analyze the relationships between shared core beliefs in religions and in human rights advocates and initiatives
- Students will explain the connections between current extreme religious movements and power grabs by men within government and corporations

More than anything else, I said, I want to be the last girl in the world with a story like mine.

Nadia Murad, UN Address, September 16, 2016

What Is Religion? Why Does It Matter?

A discussion on resisting religious violence against women may begin by asking whether there is a point to religion in the first place. Does religion have value today? The young people of the US and parts of Western Europe can move between religions, picking and choosing which tidbits they love or hate. However, this has not been the experience of the vast majority of the people in the world. Mercy Oduyoye reminds us that we are born into the religion of our family or ethnic group (Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, n.d.). Many who wish to leave a religion must also leave their family, friends, support system, and community; and in some countries, it is illegal for women or children to change their religion. In several countries, like the Sudan, children must become life-long adherents to the religion of their father even if they never live with him (Ibraheem & Bach, 2022).

Religion is not easily defined; rather, it can be described in terms of both its esoteric beliefs and its everyday applications. In the end, religion is a set of beliefs and practices which helps people make sense and meaning of the world (Pew Research Center, 2022). Religions can be large-scale and tightly organized or loosely organized; they can be small and local; they can even be individual. Even people who are non-religious engage in acts of meaning-making, and religion affects their lives because of its influence as a social institution ordering relationships, influencing policy and practice, and pervading cultural norms. Whether we actively engage religion or try to reject it, we are all surrounded by the effects of a world full of other people also engaged in systems of meaning-making.

Religion, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad. While for many people, it offers personal comfort and encouragement to do good in the world and work toward justice; it is also used to gain power and oppress others (Pew Research Center, 2022). Prolonged dominance over others requires the use of violence and/or the threat of violence. Religions often justify and promote violence, especially against women, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minoritized populations.

Across the world and throughout history, people have spoken or written about their experiences with the divine or the spiritual essence of themselves. Whether it was Abraham called by God out of Haran to a land of his own, Jesus teaching about living a life of love toward others, Muhammed dictating to his wives his experiences with Allah, Tawûsî Melek watching over the Yazidi people, or local artists rendering images of the Hindu God in its endless manifestations; religion connects the divine residing outside us with the divine voice/presence/longing inside each of us. The Quakers call this the light of Christ. Buddhists reject a definition, but seek to move this essence toward Nirvana. Asian cultures with Confucianist history integrate this philosophy into their functioning worldview so much that even Chinese atheism functions as a full-blown religion, with the Chinese Party as the deity and the Chairman as its representative on earth.



Children celebrating Saraswati Puja (Worship of Devi Saraswati, the Goddess of Knowledge and Wisdom)

Since religion is such an intrinsic part of the human journey, how can we engage it in our personal lives and on behalf of others? These are the true questions of religion worth considering, regardless of which religion we claim. In society, religion can reinforce or promote an inequitable status quo. Religion frequently abdicates personal responsibility toward others by justifying oppression or violence as Divine will (Kippenberg, 2011; Mikhail, 2018). As a means of making sense of the world, religion can easily play either hero or villain, depending on people's motives: it can both justify violence, and call violence into question (Le Roux, 2017). Violence against women, children, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ people can be enacted through all social institutions, from law and government to education, healthcare, and the economy; these sites of violence are often rooted in religion and personal systems of meaning-making (Türkkan & Odacı, 2024). For example, in the United States, the current spate of anti-transgender national laws and policies is closely connected to conservative Christian beliefs about gender binaries. At the same time, other Christians, driven by their religious convictions, are working passionately to support and protect transgender people.

Why Does Religion Turn Violent?

When they begin, religions are vibrant and alive. They spread among people as fast-moving ideas to explain the world. Women are often at the forefront of religious movements in their early stages, but as they gain traction and become formally organized, men move to the front and women are pushed to the back (Garvin, 2022). Because patriarchy has limited women's religious leadership, most religious texts and records have been written by men and reflect men's experiences of the world, despite claiming to be authoritative for all experiences (Andaya, 2006). When women, children, and other minorities are not active participants in the codification of religions, their lives and experiences do not inform the meaning-making process; the experiences of the dominant group become normative, and these norms perpetuate dominance (Garvin, 2021).

Because violence and threats of violence are necessary pieces of dominance within patriarchy, gendered religious violence becomes a central feature (Carter, 2014; Sotoudeh, 2023). While established religions tend to blame and vilify women as “unclean” from menstruation (Stange et al., 2011), require them to be “submissive” to men for a host of reasons, and view physical or sexual differences as deformities; they also highlight the power struggle in every religion to understand the differences between the gendered human experience with physical bodies and an ungendered divine being or spirit. The urge to label others as inferior or to deny them equal human rights is a common human reaction to difference: religion merely claims a divine justification for it.

Just as languages do not share exact conceptual meanings (in translation), neither do religious systems of belief. Much of the inter-religious conflict we see today is a result of this. For instance, Hinduism does not differentiate between philosophy and religion; this gives great latitude in reimagining a deity in endless manifestations. On top of all this, ultraconservative or fundamentalist movements in a religious system always lead to more repressive systems of gender violence, as we see today in the rise of white Christian nationalism (Gross, 2024), the influence of hyper-conservative forms of Islam like Wahhabism (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022), and the genocide of Gazans by a Zionist Israeli government (Shaheed, 2020).

Religious Justifications for Violence Against Women

Systemic oppression and abuse of women is commonly excused or required by religious teachings (Cooke, 2019; Murad & Krajewski, 2017; Nason-Clark, 1996; Türkkan & Odacı, 2024), as a way to safeguard male power and dominance. Religious violence takes many forms: honor killings, acid attacks, rape, forced prostitution, sex trade, assault, sexual assault, hunger, neglect, female genital mutilation/cutting, shaving hair, kidnappings, forced marriage, denying sexual literacy, purity culture, queer-bashing, arrest, torture, execution, and femicide (Carter, 2014; Garvin, 2021; UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2022).

Some religious doctrines allow men to maintain dominance in the name of and under the command of their deity (Le Roux, 2017; Türkkan & Odacı, 2024). These systems not only perpetuate conditions where women must cook, clean, and bear children—which is dismissed as unvalued labor (Despeux & Kohn, 2003)—they may also encourage intentional abuse (Ajayi et al., 2022).

Blame and Shame, Obedience and Coercion

In addition to the physical violence against the bodies in which women and other gender minorities live, they also face mental, social, emotional, and economic violence through religious belief and practice. Such beliefs may deny them access to healthcare and education. Strict adherence to these beliefs mean women may remain socially isolated in their homes, and be judged solely on the status of their virginity.

Some religions dictate that women cannot enter religious leadership or speak to systems of religious governance. When men retain all of the positions of teaching and leadership within a religion, women do not know the parts of

the sacred texts which tell men to treat all people with kindness and compassion (Zoepf, 2016). They do not know that they, too, are considered valuable as an individual.

Virginity and Male Honor

In some societies, the condition of a woman's virginity and whether she is "pure" enough to bear children for a man is centralized in religion to the extent that the "honor" of her male family members rests on her uterus (Chesler & McGovern, 2015; Zoepf, 2016). Fathers, brothers, uncles, and other male relatives plot and kill (Kippenberg, 2011) thousands of women a year in "honor killings," while local laws protect this violence (Nadeau & Mortensen, 2024; Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013).

Honor killings and acid attacks, or "burnings" in Pakistan, exemplify the trauma inflicted on women when their bodies become the living vessels of male honor. Lama Abu-Odeh argues that the very idea of masculinity in Arab countries is bound up with the defense of female relatives' chastity (Zoepf, 2016).

Women Are No One's Honor / زن ناموس هیچکس نیست

Sajjad Kalanaky

In Iran, femicide or *honor killings* (*ghatle namoosi*), “the misogynous killing of women by men” (Radford & Russell, 1992) are often perpetrated by *male relatives* for the sake of preserving the family's honor.

Most femicide victims are under age 50, and at least one was just nine years old (Stop Femicide Iran, 2024). Husbands or ex-husbands are the main perpetrators; they may stab, strangle, suffocate, shoot, behead, or set their victim on fire.

Iranian law allows and even encourages femicides. Article 630 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code states: “Whenever a man sees his wife committing adultery with a man and knows that the wife has consented to it, he can kill both of them.” Therefore, “this kind of ‘honor killing’ is not punishable” (Farhadi & Janjevic, 2024).



Remembering women killed by the Islamic regime in Iran (in solidarity with Woman, Life, Freedom)

Honor killings also affect LGBTQIA+ people. One of the most horrific queer honor killings was the beheading of Ali Fazeli Monfared in 2021 by his male relatives after he was outed as gay (Pakzad, 2021).

Stop Femicide Iran (n.d.) fights femicide with the three-pronged approach of “documentation, education, and empowerment” and Stop Honor Killings (n.d.) endeavors to give a “voice to the victims of honor killings,” encapsulated by their motto:

“Women are no one’s property. No one is defined as another person’s honor.”

“زن ناموس هیچکس نیست. هیچکس ناموس هیچکس نیست.”

While Christians may question these actions, generations of “Purity Culture” in Western Christianity separate women from healthcare and saddle them with the responsibility for any “impure” thoughts any man or boy might have about her body. Many Christian women live lives of guilt and warped sexuality, where they don’t understand how to access medical care after a miscarriage, or are condemned and shunned for reporting abuse (Flanagan, 2024).

Females are also the victims of child marriages. Across parts of the Middle East and Africa, a young girl is not even required to be present at her own wedding, but finds out when her family takes her to another house and abandons her there to a lifetime of rape and childbearing at the hand of whoever paid her parents her dowry (Ajayi et al., 2022).

Historically, wars have been waged over resources and religious beliefs. As a result, it is important to maintain a steady supply of young men to fight those wars, and only women can bear those men. So, men use and abuse women in the name of religion to fight wars and expand their influence and power (Gbowee & Mithers, 2011) even though the Bible, like the Quran, extols not the virtues of power, but those of community and care for the poor.

Queer people who do not fall within the binaries of male and female are considered ultimately destructive to the power structures that safeguard the patriarchal systems that oppress women, children, and minorities so that a few men can lead lives of greed, power, and leisure. Same-sex couples create homes without the requisite binary hierarchy that supports the continuation of social oppression. Two lesbian women are not being ruled by a man or two gay men are not engaged in oppressing women. Members of the trans population expose the reality that men and women are not superior or inferior based on genitalia, but rather confirm that both women and men are equally smart and gifted in life.

Women from Eastern Europe and those from the United States to South America continue to face another form of sexual violence—lack of access to abortion and continued narrowing of reproductive rights (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Kasztelan, 2024). Countries with significant conservative Christian populations use religious beliefs to control women through limitation of reproductive freedoms. At this moment in the US, a key argument is when “personhood” begins. Many argue that a fertilized egg is a full human being with all of the rights of any other person.

The male leaders of Catholic and evangelical Protestant churches have declared loudly and emphatically that even when they cannot tell you anything about how female anatomy works (Marder, 2022), they say life begins at conception (Bricker, 2022), which is defined as the moment a sperm enters an egg and God adds a divine spark. Many religious people also refuse to accept gender diversity (Eske, 2023; Hattenstone, 2019).

The fight over “abortion rights” is less about sustaining life than it is about power and who controls the sexual life of women, viewed as temptresses in the legacy of Eve (Edwards, 2022; Milne, 1989). While the oldest battle in religious belief has been the power of women over reproduction and fertility—and how men live in fear because they do not hold that power—for those in Judaism and Christianity, it is a double indictment because the sexuality of woman also caused the demise of a perfectly created world made by God for man. So, the pushback is not just about bodily autonomy, but also resentment and religious blame for evil in the world. Resistance to sexual violence against Catholic, Protestant, and all women requires continuing to uphold the rights for each person to make medical decisions about their own bodies without religiously motivated civil laws.

Without knowledge of how their own body works or access to medical care for pregnancies, births, miscarriages, and infertility, women bear the religious irresponsibility of men within their own bodies, minds, hearts, and souls.

Religious Violence in Conservative Movements

Today, conservative movements are expanding oppression as they peel back the democracies and freedoms of the Post-World War II era. While we can look at this as only a religious movement, we miss the point if we do not connect the religious actions to expansion of corporate empires under the guise of religion. Religion teaches people to comply; democracy teaches people to choose. Corporate big men have gained traction since 1980 by forming working relationships with religious leaders. Since January 2025, Americans have seen that the religious leaders were not really moving corporate leaders “toward God, but rather corporate leaders were manipulating religious leaders and groups to expand their power, influence, and profits.”

In a time where women are fighting for equal healthcare and wages, the “trad wife” influencers have distracted women away from equal rights. In Texas, maternal mortality rates have skyrocketed as doctors were prohibited from performing needed abortions. Transgender people are increasingly targeted by social stigma and withholding of essential medical care.

At a national level, Americans claim to want to support democracies and freedom around the world, but Republican presidents end healthcare funding for the world’s most vulnerable women, and 2025 has seen the brutal dismantling of the world’s largest refugee- and democracy-stabilizing work in the history of the world, as all USAID employees were abruptly fired.

The devastating changes wrought since January of 2025 have not proved that hatred against women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ people is justified. Rather it has highlighted the hypocrisies of fundamentalists who claim to work on behalf of a divine being; but who, in truth, seek only to wield power over others.

Religious Violence and Anti-Democratic Politics

Since Republican candidate Ronald Reagan falsely claimed in 1980 that poor black women were scamming hard-working Americans out of their money, this lie has become the backbone of Republican fiscal policy to outrage and

distract voters—while corporations and their stockholders consolidated nearly all the wealth in America. A group of conservative evangelical and Catholic religious leaders joined the Reagan campaign to rally churchgoers around the “offense” of women accessing abortions legally. Although they framed abortion as a religious issue, it has really been about power—a backlash against the legal rights women finally obtained in the 1970’s, from owning bank accounts to accessing healthcare without guardianship. Republicans today are the heirs of that backlash—stealing wealth and control from Americans under the guise of religious mandates.

Project 2025 is a result of two decades of research and planning on how to circumvent the checks and balances of our Constitutional system to institute White Christian Nationalism. Since Project 2025 comes out of a hyper-conservative religion and aims for a minority (white men) to control everyone else, its main target is the re-subjugation of women, children, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minorities; stripping them of freedoms, rights, and a voice in their life and future. For example, for over a decade, Leo Leonard has schemed to install Supreme Court judges (Kroll et al., 2023) to ensure the court does not use its constitutional power to control the overreach of the White House. Dark money and quiet backers like the Koch brothers have funded decades of legislative campaigns to elect weak politicians to enable control of Congress.

The chaos we see in Washington, DC, today constitutes an organized assault on American democracy. Casualties include mass firings, gutting and eliminating of departments, cancellation of grants and funding, illegal deportations of immigrants and students; and orders illegally given and followed, ignoring courts and the law.

For all of this, the people behind these movements are eager to dismantle our democracy. Some may wish to think of this moment as the “dying gasp” of white male power, but the moment is more likely to catapult all of us into a dark future of fascism if we do not stand up and own our democracy, as Eleanor Roosevelt challenged us to do. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us that “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual doom” (King, 1967).

Religion, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Any religion, by itself, cannot solve the problem of human violence against others. History shows that individuals in any time and place can wield too much influence in a particular religion and quickly inspire mass violence. Charismatic men may pursue their own narcissistic ends by surrounding themselves with followers who will support them in exchange for furthering their own power-based agendas. Too often, these include oppression of women, LGBTQIA+ people, and ethnic minorities: for example, controlling people’s reproductive freedom of choice, ensuring white supremacy over people of color, and enforcing “normative” heterosexuality.

How do we provide tethers—safeguards—for religion? Not by limiting religion, but by coming together, taking the best wisdom from all our faiths, and combining them to ensure protections in which all people can realize their human potential. In this, government and religion enter a symbiotic relationship where legal freedom protects religious expression and religious freedom ensures one religion cannot gain political power over others.

In *The Moral Basis of Democracy* (1940), Eleanor Roosevelt explained how religion teaches us to care for each other in a society, but that society cannot confine itself to only one religion, or it does not experience true freedom. Each generation must choose for itself whether it will engage in the work of democracy for themselves and their children. The moral basis of democracy is born of religion, but it must offer freedom to *all* because the future of any society lies in whether it concerns itself with all members: “the common good.”

After the horrors of World War II, President Truman asked influential speaker and author First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to become the United States’ first representative to the United Nations. Her experience traveling the country listening to the women who filled the factories, combined with her shared dream with FDR of the UN as a place the world could come together and avoid the mistakes that followed the war, made her uniquely gifted to lead world leaders to agree on a Universal Declaration of Human Rights built on the best of the world’s religions, but not constrained by any one of them. She led the process of succinctly defining what it means to live without fear as a human being, in any nation, with any religion. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted by the world’s nations (United Nations, n.d.).



First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt holding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948

Today, many countries look to the United Nations and pluralistic democracies (those in which power is distributed across groups) to support resistance to religious violence in their countries and establish their own democracies. The sudden fall of Afghanistan back to the Taliban reminds us that young democracies are fragile and support is needed to root democracy in people’s hearts and their systems of civil government, which both supports religion and protects its citizens from religious violence (Maizland, 2023; Shahalimi & Atwood, 2022). The UDHR remains the gold standard for the rights each person is entitled to enjoy in their own life regardless of their government, race, country, culture of origin, faith, gender, physical body, or any other human difference (Sotoudeh, 2023).

Resisting Religious Violence

The work of resisting religious violence happens at several levels: within ourselves, in our communities, in our countries, and across the world. Each of us is suited for exceptional engagement at one or more of these levels. How do we learn about each other, commit to resist violence, and create a more equitable world?

Question Religious Justifications for Violence

The following books and accounts offer insights into women's struggles to reclaim the inherent worth of individuals promised at the heart of their religions, in spite of attempts to justify violence in the name of those religions.

Surviving God (Kim & Shaw, 2024) offers permission for an ungendered reading of the Bible as resistance against the shocking prevalence of sexual violence against women in conservative Christianity.

We Are Still Here (Shahalimi & Atwood, 2022) exposes the lived realities of Afghan women and highlights their resistance in the face of the extremist Taliban takeover.

Lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh (2023) describes the work of Iranians fighting mandatory hijab and death penalty in *Women, Life, Freedom*.

Businesswoman Mariam Ibraheem recounts death row and growing up in the refugee camps of Sudan under Sharia law in *Shackled* (Ibraheem & Bach, 2022).

Learn from Peace Advocates

The annual Nobel Peace Prize recognizes a person or group that has distinguished itself by breathing life into the hurting parts of a society or the world at large (The Nobel Prize, n.d.). Taking the time to learn about these award recipients will motivate you to resist violence.

Nadia Murad (NPP 2018) shared with the world her experiences in the sex trade and the attempted genocide of the Yazidi religious minority (Murad & Krajeski, 2017).

Shirin 'Ibādī (Ebadi) (NPP 2003), a sitting judge at the time of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, speaks out about how religious violence dismisses women from existence ('Ibādī & Moaveni, 2006).

Being shot by the Taliban at age 15 did not stop Malala Yousafzai (NPP 2014) from advocating for girl's education (Yousafzai & Lamb, 2013).

President Jimmy Carter (NPP 2002) continued to advocate for ending religious violence against women and recognizing our previously unseen prejudices even from his hospice bed (2014).

In 2003, social worker Leymah Gbowee (NPP 2011) led a non-violent movement of Christian and Muslim women (WIPNET) in Liberia, forcing its dictator to go into exile, restoring democracy, and enabling Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (NPP 2011) to become president in 2006 (Stiehm, 2006).

Kenyan scientist Wangari Muta Maathai (NPP 2004) organized resistance to religious tribal violence in 1977 by partnering with displaced women to plant trees and eventually creating the Green Belt Movement, an environmental-religious-peace-women's rights movement (Maathai, 2007).



Tawakkul Karman, Leymah Roberta Gbowee, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf receive the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize

Challenge Yourself to Engage Against Religious Violence

Nobel Peace Prize winners and other notable brave women offer the following ideas for large and small ways you can engage with resistance to religious violence and support others in their efforts to do so:

- Value the stories of victims and survivors
- Create opportunities to make ungendered readings of religious texts
- Hold/host meaningful conversations with religious and civil leaders
- Identify and partner with informal religious leaders
- Provide access to social services for survivors
- Create platforms to gain the attention of international leaders with change-making resources and influence
- Embody kindness and sit with the broken-hearted
- Make time to read personal stories
- Provide money to travel to centers of violence to partner with and resource endangered populations

- Prioritize listening over assuming
- Find the courage to speak truth to power while doing so in a way that does not end a conversation
- Cultivate the desire to continue learning and growing yourself into new ways of thinking and understanding
- Find the sheer tenacity to believe in hope
- Name and integrate the conscious and unconscious influences of your own experiences and religious beliefs

Resisting religious violence requires recognizing, developing, and using all of these skills regardless of your culture, background, or own religious choices.

Organized Resistance Today

While we do our own personal work to resist gender violence, we also have to organize to make effective structural change in institutions, laws, policies, and beliefs that affect women, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minoritized groups. In our globalized world we must work together, within and across organized religions, to resist religious-based gender violence. Religious social justice activists are universally clear that their resistance comes from within their own religions and meaning-making, and they also need civil-legal support from the United Nations and the world's pluralistic democracies (Longley, 2024; PrinciplesofDemocracy.org, n.d.).



Solidarity protests around the world for Woman, Life, Freedom and the women of Iran

The work of resistance is not against men or religion in general, but against systems of power and abuse, including religious systems and beliefs. For many activists, religious faith inspires their resistance, and they find guidance in interpretations of religious texts that suggest ways religion can support rather than harm people.

Learning Activity: Examining Women's Resistance to Religious Gender Violence

Objective: Students will examine and interpret the intersections of religion and gender violence, highlighting the resistance from the individuals below leading the charge within their faith communities.

1. Divide the class into groups, with each assigned a topic from below:
 - Nadia Murad (Yazidi genocide survivor): Explore how Nadia resisted sexual violence and trafficking under ISIS rule and how her faith and cultural identity influenced her activism.
 - Malala Yousafzai (education): Explore Malala's fight against the Taliban's ban on girls' education and her advocacy for girls' rights, paying close attention to how she experienced religiously inspired violence against her.
 - Leymah Gbowee (Liberian Women's Peace Movement): Explore how Christian and Muslim women in Liberia collaborated across differences to end a civil war and resist religious violence against women.
 - Shirin 'Ibādī (Ebadi) (Iranian judge and human rights advocate): Explore how 'Ibādī's legal work intersects with religious law in Iran. Pay particular attention to her advocacy for gender justice within Islam.
 - Mariam Ibraheem (Sudanese Christian activist): Explore her resistance to being sentenced to death under Sharia law for apostasy and the violence she faced for choosing her faith.
2. Have each group choose an artistic format to represent their group's activist story. Choose from drawing, performance art, music, poetry, or short story format.
3. Have groups present their art to the class introducing each woman you have chosen to represent. Reflect and discuss.

Across the world, religious social justice activists continue to come together to actively resist religious violence. Groups such as the Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence facilitate local organization as well as legal fights to protect vulnerable populations (n.d.).

In India, women are reclaiming their deities to fight the taboos which have kept them out of their own religious sites during their child-bearing years. Muslims are using comics to challenge religious taboos about menstruation and create safe spaces for women and girls (Muslimahs Against Abuse Center, n.d.).

Coordenadoria Ecumênica de Serviço ([Ecumenical Coordination of Service], n.d.) in Brazil works across religious groups to defend human rights through political, economic, social, and environmental transformations toward democracy.

The UN and its organizations remain committed to the expansion and integration of human rights across the globe. The Nobel Peace Prize Committee continues to highlight brave individuals and organizations which embody bravery, compassion, and care for all humanity and enable them to speak and expand their work and influence.

Summary

There is no one right way to resist violence, but experience in a globalized world has taught us that multiple pieces of resistance are needed for effective progress. The answer is not to abandon religion, but rather to dig deeper into religious faith—to understand how and why people engage in religious meaning-making—to tether religion to a global understanding of human rights, and to creatively learn from the experiences of others. We all are making sense of the world around us and wondering what lies beyond our current lived consciousness. Some, like many young people across North America and Europe, can choose their religious faith; others, across much of the world, are born into their religious tradition. Regardless, as we grow and learn, we all have some measure of ability to choose how we will live, what is right or wrong, how we want to shape the future and why. Democracy has shown us that, while it is not immune from the effects of a hard-right religious push toward religious nationalism, it does offer a profound sanctuary for religious pluralism as long as the people of the democracy actively *value and embody diversity and human rights* (Longley, 2024).

As long as we draw breath, we hold power to resist religious violence, to uphold human rights for ourselves and others, and to listen to wisdom. Every person does meaning-making at the intersections of their identity—race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical ability, and age—and these change over time. We can choose to use religion to justify gender violence, or we can name religious violence, seek its cause, and transform cultural and religious practices into non-violent forms more in line with the core values of love and justice shared across religions. Surrounding ourselves with a mosaic of beliefs will push us to learn, grow more, advocate more, and stand up to religious violence together. Humans are an endless source of creative resistance against religious violence.

Review Questions

What are some manifestations of religious-based violence against women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people (select all that apply)?

- Honor killings, including acid attacks
- Blaming females for men's "impure" thoughts
- Female genital mutilation
- Purity culture



Which of the following are Nobel Peace Prize Laureates (select all that apply)?

- Nadia Murad
- Shirin 'Ibādī (Ebadi)
- Jimmy Carter
- Malala Yousafzai



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a document (select all that apply):

- Created following World War II
- Based on the moral precepts of democracy
- Advocating for freedom of religion but not based on religion
- None of the above



Which of the following are characteristics of pluralistic democracies (select all that apply)?

- They are immune to religious takeovers
- They spread power across groups
- They can combine with the UNDR, the United Nations, and religious social activists to work against religious violence
- They can be a sanctuary for religious pluralism



What are some suggestions for ways to collaborate to resist religious violence and to support women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and other minoritized groups?

- Hold/host meaningful conversations with religious and civil leaders
- Create platforms to gain the attention of international leaders with change-making resources and influence
- Cultivate the desire to continue learning and growing yourself into new ways of thinking and understanding
- Value the stories of victims and survivors



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.edu/resistinggender violence/?p=290#h5p-14>

Answer key: 1. all of the above, 2. all of the above, 3. all of the above, 4. b., c., and d., 5. all of the above

Questions for Reflection

1. What role do religious institutions or religious teachings play in either supporting or resisting violence against women, transgender people, and LGBTQIA+ people, particularly in societies where religious beliefs heavily influence laws and cultural practices? How are women and transgender people particularly impacted by law and policy that is influenced by religious practices?
2. How can grassroots activists, particularly women, queer people, and transgender people within faith communities, create spaces for resistance to religiously sanctioned violence? How can they transform religious practices and beliefs to promote gender equality and justice? Find concrete examples of activists doing this work currently.
3. In what way does the UN Declaration of Human Rights help people from all religions in every country of the world live in increased safety and greater religious freedom?
4. If there is common ground among religions like caring for the poor and choosing love over hate, then why is there so much religious conflict? How can we work together on shared religious ideals for the good of all the people in our community and world?
5. What can you do to make sure your religious beliefs do not hurt other people? How do you make sure righteous anger at injustice does not fester into hatred or bitterness in you? How do you stay focused on what is good and live it out in your everyday actions toward other people?

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TRANSNATIONAL FEMINIST ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

Giovanna Vingelli

Abstract

The history of feminism can be read as an effort to construct, through struggle, a unity among women, starting from their common experiences of material and symbolic oppressions (Hunter, 1996). However, since different historical, social, and cultural contexts create different power relations, the experience of being a woman is also different. This explains not only the transformation of feminism over time, but also its differentiation into a plurality of feminisms.

Since the 1990s, transnational feminist movements have been adopting a broad agenda that recognizes the different institutional, economic, and social contexts in which women operate. Transnational feminists engage with local and international powers, joining other movements, but doing so in the “first person”; that is, maintaining their authority and autonomy.

Transnational feminists utilize an intersectional feminism that, while recognizing and honoring their differences, chooses to fight together against the violence of patriarchy, racism, classism, heterosexism, and economic oppression. This transnational perspective rejects the abstract idea of a generic “woman,” as well as a single and universal path of liberation valid for all. Transnational feminists bring together a diversity of issues under a single feminist umbrella, challenging societal assumptions about gender-based violence and holding both society and the state accountable for perpetuating such violence.

Learning Outcomes

- Students will explain the importance of the terms “intersectionality” and “transnational feminism” in the context of the last five decades of feminist action
- Students will describe some of the key changes and realizations that occurred as a result of transnational meetings, documents, organizations, and actions

Contemporary Feminist Activism and the Quest for Intersectionality

Contemporary feminist activism crosses different spatial dimensions, addressing issues at global and local levels. It involves a range of strategies, mobilizing women from different countries around a set of common issues. Within these commonalities, though, the differences in women’s lives are shaped by the positions each occupies based on her markers of identity and her membership in groups.

What does it mean to be a woman? In the 1980s, non-Western feminists began to critique the “abstract universality” assumed in masculine discourses and practices, and also within Western feminism itself; that is, the idea that “all people” or “all women” shared the same set of characteristics and circumstances. The 1980s’ second wave of Western feminism has been criticized for reflecting primarily the interests of white, heterosexual, educated, urban, middle-class women; to the exclusion of members of all other identities, including gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age and generation, disability, and nationality. In reality, these categories intersect to produce further social inequalities that cannot be resolved using the theory that all women in the world share the same experiences precisely because they are women. The twentieth-century ideal of “universal sisterhood” (Morgan, 1984) contributed to the stereotype of a universal “female,” even when its intention was to denounce misogyny and discrimination against women.

Starting in the 1970s, groups of black women, lesbians, women from “Third World” countries, and women belonging to other minority groups have criticized this Western feminism for its influence on feminist political agendas, disregarding the life experiences of other women. In the late 1970s, the Combahee River Collective (CRC) issued a statement describing the notion of “multiple oppressions,” drawing on the experiences of black women, and including race, gender, sexuality, and class oppression (Combahee River Collective, 2018). It conceived of oppression as the combined effects of multiple, complex systems of subordination.

The concept of “woman,” then, in feminist struggles has been presented as “universal,” but has actually taken the specific form of the Western feminist—which clearly contradicts the objectives of the feminist movement, which was

born out of the need to oppose a false universalism: that of the generic, dominant male, seen as the “norm” or center, in contrast to all “other” social positions.

Thus, feminists became aware that adding a generic or universal “woman” to a generic “man” did nothing more than duplicate already-existing power differentials. “Black feminism” and “lesbian feminism” began differentiating women’s political standpoints on the basis of sexual choice and ethnic and cultural affiliation, allowing a shift in focus to “multiple oppressions” (Weathers, 1969), or “double colonisation” (Spivak, 1988; 1999).

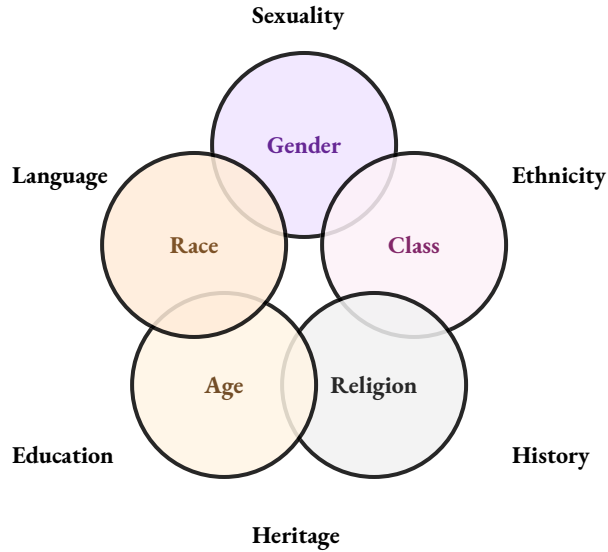
Thinking of women as a homogeneous and monolithic category had already had its negative effects: in her book *Ain’t I a Woman* (1981), bell hooks, among others, had denounced the way in which white, Western feminists had neglected and erased the different needs of non-western women. In this way, she argued, racism, classism, and ethnocentrism were reinforced within the feminist movement itself, to the detriment of women.

Chicana and lesbian author Gloria Anzaldúa illustrated (1987) how Chicana women are even the victims of triple, if not quadruple, discrimination: racial, because of their color and ethnicity; class, because they are economically disadvantaged; gender, because they are women; and possibly sexual orientation. Faced with this knot, we need to think of a feminism based on the recognition of the different levels of reality women experience, to propose “a feminist solidarity as opposed to vague assumptions of sisterhood or images of total identification with the other” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 3). It is the examination of these realities that animates *intersectionality*: a complex and contested concept, but one that, since its beginning around the 1990s, has proved useful as a theoretical, conceptual, and political tool for sorting through the multiple and simultaneous aspects of women’s oppression.

Moving to Intersectional Viewpoints

As these key ideas about the complexity of inequality were developing within black women’s political activism, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality,” defined as “a complex system of multiple, simultaneous structures of oppression” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. 359). She specified that *structural intersectionality* refers to the overlapping factors relevant to people’s experiences in society. For example, gender-based violence is experienced differently by white women and black women. *Political intersectionality* refers to how political strategies that address one axis of oppression cannot ignore other factors. For example, feminist movements fail women of color if they do not acknowledge issues of racism.

INTERSECTIONALITY



What is Intersectionality? "Overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination."

Patricia Hill Collins, a feminist scholar who has adopted the intersectional model, posits that race, class, and gender are "interlocking systems of oppression" (1993). She writes that "the sexual politics of Black womanhood reveals the fallacy of assuming that gender affects all women the same way—race and class matter greatly" (2000, p. 229).

Crucial Understandings for Feminist Cooperation

Coined by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in 1989, *intersectionality* is rooted in the research and activism of women of color, extending back to Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech in 1851.

Observing the absence of women of color in feminist and race-based social movements, scholar activists like Crenshaw, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga have called for a deeper look at the interconnected factors that influence power, privilege, and oppression.

Now more than ever, it's important to look boldly at the reality of race and gender bias—and understand how the two can combine to create even more harm. As Crenshaw says, if you're standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion, you're likely to get hit by both. She calls on us to bear witness to this reality and speak up for victims of prejudice.

Transnational feminism takes into account women's experiences on a global scale by focusing on intersectionality, colonialism, and imperialism. The theories and practices of this movement seek to understand how race, gender, social class, culture, and sexuality are affected on a global scale. While the term "global feminism" favors a universalized model of women's liberation that celebrates individuality and modernity, the term "transnational," meaning "across borders," recognizes inequalities arising from women's differences and is committed to activism that encourages dialogue for change.

An example of transnational feminism can be seen in Chimamanda Adichie's video "The Danger of a Single Story." Adichie is a Nigerian novelist and writer who has won numerous awards for her work. In her TED Talks video, she says that hearing only one story about someone/someplace is very limiting and creates unnecessary stereotypes. Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice—and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

Since every person belongs to more than one social category, and these categories interact both at the individual level and at the level of groups and institutions, it is necessary to consider the relationships between them; to analyze their "intersections" (Crenshaw, 2011) or "intersections between axes of power" (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Intersectional analysis suggests that "combinations" of identity factors are not mere overlaps, but produce significant and substantively specific experiences of oppression and privilege for different women.

In an intersectional approach, the primary focus is not on individual differences, but on their political recognition. In this view, differences are not set against each other, but juxtaposed: not hierarchically, but simultaneously.

Transnational Feminist Theories and Practices

These reflections and theorizations have been fundamental to the emergence of the “third wave” of feminism, which starts from the inescapable reality of differences between women, and thus the existence of multiple feminisms. Contemporary feminisms have produced a new form of theorizing reflecting on the never “neutral” position from which our subjectivity is formed. What is being questioned is the *universalist* concept, according to which all women, as women, are fundamentally equal, with the same history of oppression and the same desires. A type of feminism that is situation-specific and constantly changing then becomes the starting point of transnational feminism, which takes an intersectional approach to analyzing the oppressions and inequalities an individual suffers, taking into account the social, economic, religious, and political contexts in which they live.

Transnational feminist theory and practice emphasize intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, social activism and justice, and collaboration. They seek to highlight social structures that increase power differentials, including colonialism and neo-colonialism, economic realities, and global capitalism: “This project stems from our work on theories of travel and the intersections of feminist, colonial and postcolonial discourses, modernism and postmodern hybridity” (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994, p. 1).

The term “transnational” is an umbrella term that has emerged as “a way of naming the dramatically increasing flows of people, things, images and ideas across nation-state borders in the era of ‘globalisation’” (Conway, 2019, p. 43). Transnational feminist perspectives focus on the diverse experiences of women living within, between, and on the borders of nation-states around the globe. These perspectives transcend nation-state boundaries because of the many interacting geopolitical forces affecting women’s experiences. They also involve communication across traditional global, regional, and local boundaries. They include the experiences of immigrants, refugees, displaced persons, those who have experienced forced migration, members of a cultural diaspora who may be dispersed across multiple regions, as well as those who identify as third culture, and those who seek to integrate multiple cultural identities (Horne & Arora, 2013). Transnational practice may take place in women’s nations or cultures of origin, in cultures in which they are displaced or immigrants, or in settings in which they are temporary sojourners. It also includes the experiences of women living in cultural borderlands and intercultural spaces (Zerbe et al, 2021).

If the idea of “global sisterhood” (Morgan, 1984) assumed women’s commonalities; transnational feminisms, on the contrary, assume women’s differences. Mohanty (2003) emphasizes the need for feminists to theorize in new and deeply contextualized ways about alliances and solidarity, and the urgency of an anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and post-colonial feminist project promoting mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships between diverse communities.

Transnational feminist practices thus call for work comparing women’s multiple oppressions and their intersections, rather than focusing on a theory of oppression using the universal category of “women,” abandoning the idea of constructing a unified feminist agenda (Basu, 1995). In this way, Mohanty proposes a “feminism without borders” as a strategy for addressing the injustices of global capitalism and opening up new possibilities: “it is through this model that we can put into practice the idea of common difference as the basis for deeper solidarity across differences and unequal power relations” (Mohanty, 2003, p. 250).

The Genesis of Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism differs from global feminism and international or intra-national feminism in that it examines the complexity of women's identities as they are formed by the intersections of national identity, race, sexuality, and specific forms of economic exploitation. Transnational feminism can be traced back to 1975, the year of the first UN Conference on Women, in Mexico City. This event—which was the result of the changing international context following colonization, and which had its origins in the explosion of the feminist movement in the West and the large presence of women in the liberation movements of many countries in the South (Rai, 2002)—was of enormous value because it allowed more than 6,000 women to participate in the “civil society forum,” beyond the official delegations of each nation. While North American and European women prioritized the achievement of equality and issues of sexual rights and reproductive freedom, Latin American women preferred to focus on issues of material oppression, i.e., poverty, neo-colonial domination (the control exerted by a more powerful nation over a less powerful one), and war.

Learning Activity: Feminist Waves and Parallel Timelines

Objective: Students will analyze the limitations of the wave model of feminism and describe the importance of a global and intersectional approach to understanding feminist history. Through the use of parallel timelines, students will connect feminist movements globally across time and space.

1. Divide the class into two groups (A and B). Each group will focus on creating a timeline that compares and contrasts feminist movements in the Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere of the World.
 - Group A: Northern Hemisphere. Choose up to 10 countries using this list: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/northern-hemisphere-countries>
 - Group B: Southern Hemisphere. Choose up to 10 countries using this list: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/southern-hemisphere-countries>
2. Divide the larger groups into small groups of two or three people. Have each smaller group focus on one to two countries. Create a timeline of feminist movements in the countries you have chosen. Make sure to note any overlaps in feminist movements if the countries neighbor one another or have a significant political interaction with one another.
3. Have each of the larger groups (A and B) present their findings to the class by writing key timeline information under the headers Northern Hemisphere and Southern Hemisphere. Identify parallels between the timelines you have uncovered. Pay close attention to the ways in which the wave model either highlights or obscures the information you have found.

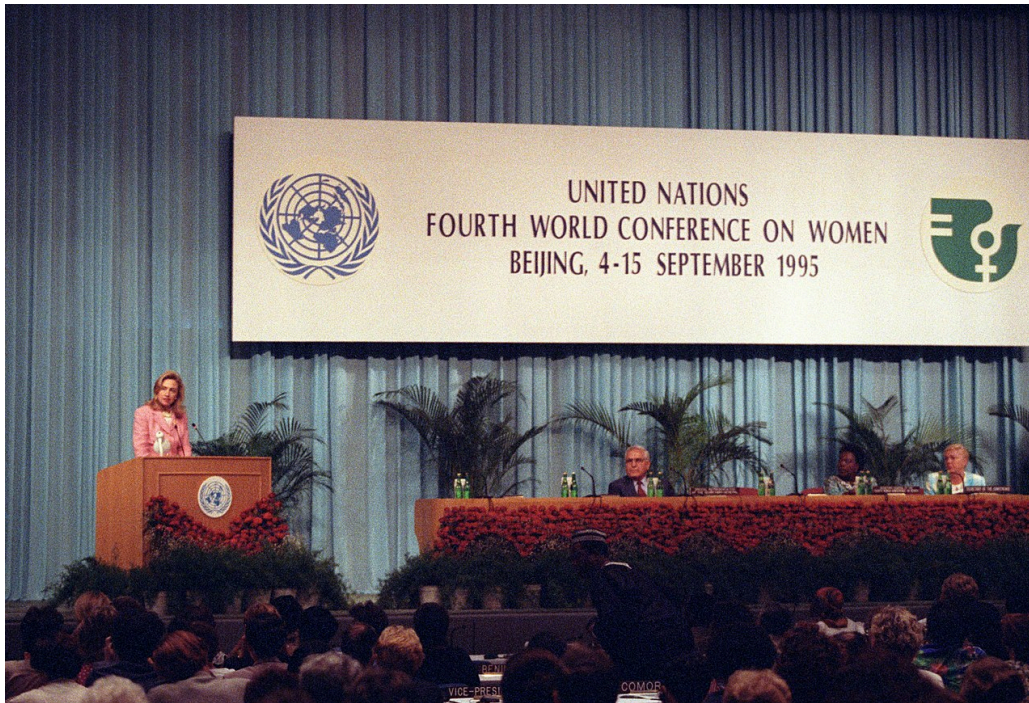
The second UN Conference, in Copenhagen (1980), would reveal even more this conflict between different political standpoints among different groups of women, the complexity of their situations that were completely different for cultural, economic, and political reasons. In those years, the international context was profoundly shaken by the breakdown of the old balances between the West, the Communist world, and what was still defined as the “Third World” (that is, countries that were unaligned with either the West or with Communism during the Cold War. A more accepted term today is “developing countries”). This general climate of change led the women gathered in Copenhagen to abandon the “common denominator” of “gender” and instead to focus on different cultural and political affiliations in interpreting the causes of the enormous gap that was widening between rich and poor countries.

In fact, for many of the participants, especially those from the global South, the demand for gender equality took a back seat to the problem of increasing poverty experienced by women in their countries. This fundamental disagree-

ment was at the origin of the conflict between the still few Southern feminists and Western, especially American, feminists; but it also became a powerful instrument for the cultural and political growth of the transnational women's movement. In fact, the clash had the effect of multiplying the transnational networks of women from different continents and of deepening the critical analyses, in particular of the ecofeminists (Mies & Shiva, 1993) and of the DAWN group (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) (Sen & Grown, 1987), which were active throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

A Turning Point

Based on analyzing the cultural and economic relationships among women, men, and the management of natural resources, feminists began to critique the emerging neoliberal development model, focused solely on “economic growth” (essentially, industrial progress) and disregarding the human and environmental sustainability of development processes. These analyses were often at odds with the working methods of the major international financial institutions, especially the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.



The Conference in Beijing highlighted transnational feminisms and women's intersectional identities around the globe

The debates surrounding the Platform of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 marked a turning point in favor of a transnational approach to feminist movements. Although, on the one hand, the debates were tangible evidence that feminist movements were diverse and conflicting in practice as well as theory; on the other hand, the scale of global change in the 1990s¹ also led to a convergence of feminist perspectives and the emergence of transnational movements and alliances, bringing together women from North and South to respond to these pressures.

Transnational Mobilization and Violence Against Women

An early example of a mobilization that could be described as transnational was the World March of Women Against Poverty and Violence (WMV), launched in 1998 by the Fédération des Femmes du Québec in Montreal, Canada. This event culminated in the year 2000 in a series of other marches and actions organized around the world to protest against poverty and violence against women. Nearly 6,000 organizations from 159 countries participated in these demonstrations, and the issues raised were of course diverse and varied, depending on their contexts. Five years later, after the first World March in 2000, the WMV committee launched the Women's Global Charter for Humanity to answer a number of questions: How do we want to build a new world order? What are the prerequisites for this transformation? The Charter contains 31 "affirmations" on the themes of peace, justice, solidarity, and equality; values to be followed to create the "other world" envisioned by the WMW (Dufour & Giraud, 2007).

The interesting thing about the drafting of this document, in contrast to the previous documents produced by the UN conferences, is its circularity: the document underwent a real journey around the world so the various national committees could read, modify, and complete it. The journey began in Brazil and ended in Burkina Faso in 2005. Moving from one country to another (and therefore from one context to another) highlighted the differences both in perspective and in approach to the issues at stake, the desire to pursue a common and effective project, and the will to build a global movement with a collective identity (Dufour & Giraud, 2007); but without overriding the will of the individual context. In order to achieve this unity, a series of compromises were accepted through dialogue, both on the issues to be addressed and on the methods of implementation (Moghadam, 2005).



Women occupied Greenham Commons Peace Camp for years, protesting nuclear weapons

Feminists and women's groups have also long been involved in peacebuilding, identifying methods of conflict resolution, and creating the necessary conditions for human security. The activities of anti-military and human rights groups such as Women Strike for Peace², Greenham Common,³ and Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo⁴ are the best known. These groups, as well as many others emerging in response to the wave of conflicts dramatically highlighting

the abuses and violence of war (Afghanistan, Bosnia, Central Africa, the Middle East), focus their attention on the particular vulnerabilities of women and girls in war, the widespread nature of sexual abuse, and the need to include women's voices in peace negotiations.

A New Phase

The transformation brought by the 2008 economic crisis is the driving force behind an equally significant transformation of feminism: “this is a moment in which feminists should think big. Having watched the neoliberal onslaught instrumentalize our best ideas, we have an opening now in which to reclaim them. In seizing the moment, we might just bend the arc of the impending transformation in the direction of justice—and not only with respect to gender” (Fraser, 2009, p. 117). It is precisely in recent years that Fraser identifies a new feminist phase, a rebirth of a radical and rebellious women's movement, linked to the visionary potential of the first wave of feminism, although starting from different assumptions, conditions, and goals.

This phase involves new technologies, the existence of a global network of users, and the emergence of “mass self-communication” (Castells, 2009). In this context, the Internet plays a crucial role in promoting the expansion of the public sphere, both locally and globally. New forums for social interaction, alternate types of activism, and the formation of new collective identities are being constituted online. The expanded possibilities for truly global networking have marked the beginning of a new era for social movements. Cyber-activism is often defined as unconventional political action, where “unconventional” means alternative tactics and expressions to traditional political structures, common in movements such as feminism (Rucht, 1990). Social media play a crucial role in the emergence of these new social movements, which benefit from the expanded possibilities of interaction, the low cost of this type of communication, and the speed of creating and disseminating messages to a potentially huge community of users.

Two mobilizations, SlutWalk and Ni Una Menos (Not One Women Less), could serve as examples of practices that combine old and new political and communicative tools to mobilize against violence against women, using this new wave of social movements. SlutWalk was born in 2011 in Toronto, Canada. The first SlutWalk march was organized in response to prejudices, behavior, and dress codes that blamed women and reinforced a misogynistic and patriarchal culture that generated violence. Although the SlutWalk protests and demonstrations were spontaneous, they have spread around the world and gained much success and support. In 2011 alone, protests took place in over 200 cities and at least 40 countries, including Spain, Hungary, Finland, Norway, South Korea, South Africa, Australia, Ukraine, Mexico, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Germany, Morocco, and England (Carr, 2018).



The first annual SlutWalk, against women-shaming, mobilized women in cities around the world

The strategy of the marches is very clear: instead of submitting to social norms about how to dress and behave in public, women use insults and accusations instrumentally and to their own advantage, with two main goals: to attract media attention and to advance women's causes, this time completely independent of governments. This new form of activism emerged at the same time as Occupy Wall Street and the occupations that characterized the Arab Springs (2011), marking a new mode of action and protest with a transnational character.

Since 2008, another new feminist movement has taken center stage on the international political scene. It began with the Spanish *Decido Yo* movement for the right to abortion, and it has spread to many countries, from the pro-choice protests in Poland and Argentina, where *Ni Una Menos* was born⁵, to the marches in the United States after Trump's election. Another step in the international feminist movement was the construction of the feminist strike, which in some countries, such as Spain, Chile, and Argentina, succeeded in establishing real blockades and people abstaining from productive and reproductive activities.



Young "Ni Una Menos" protestors sharing messages of female empowerment

Although the feminisms mentioned above deal mainly with their own national contexts, they are united by the same interpretation of violence, by similar struggles to prevent and combat patriarchal violence in the broadest sense; that is, ranging from interpersonal to institutional violence. As Segato (2022) notes, characterizing gender-based violence as a war against female and feminized bodies allows for a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of the underlying mechanisms that produce these forms of violence, which are particular and embodied.

The Argentinian feminist movement took to the streets of Buenos Aires and 120 other cities across the country on June 3, 2015, in response to the femicide of Chiara Páez, a 14-year-old girl, with over 200,000 people taking to the streets in the capital alone (Daby & Moseley, 2022).

Since the first document (Manifiesto 3 de junio 2015), and in subsequent demands, Argentinian women have addressed the issue of femicides (given the dismaying numbers in their country) from an exquisitely feminist perspective, i.e., they emphasize that femicide is not an intimate issue, related only to the domestic sphere, or a problem that affects only women; rather, it affects the whole of society. Violence against women is a form of structural violence, and not a phenomenon limited solely to one's social class, level of education, or geographical location.

"Ni Una Menos" translates as "Not one [woman] less" and is often stylized as #NiUnaMenos due to the viral nature of the movement. Ni Una Menos is a horizontal movement, made up of different groups within countries and different branches between countries, each related to the others but independent in their actions.

In the countries where Ni Una Menos has spread, in addition to purely national issues and demands, some demands are the same: the collection and publication of official statistics on violence against women, including rates of femicide; more emergency shelters and day homes for victims of gender-based violence, along with housing subsidies to

help victims achieve autonomy; the incorporation and deepening of comprehensive sexual education curriculum at all education levels; and mandatory training for government actors on the subject of sexist violence.

Ni Una Menos also shows how activists in the Global South can promote new uses of technology that not only respond to their local and immediate needs, but also contribute to the production of alternative imaginaries of big data in the longer term. The Ni Una Menos mobilization created the first “Índice nacional de violencia machista” (National Index of Male Violence) to address the lack of data and public policies on gender violence in the country.

Summary

The new feminist wave is bringing together broad demands for rights, based on a reading of the current conditions and needs of women. A new awareness has emerged of the need to rebuild bonds of solidarity, action, and collective struggles against the constant attacks on bodies, freedom, and self-determination. What this transnational movement is somehow doing is raising awareness of the stratification of women’s social status according to class, origin, “race,” and sexual orientation.

The model of comparative feminist studies proposed by Mohanty is particularly helpful because it does not focus on a single fixed theory, and thus offers more options for grasping the complexities of gender in the globalized world (Mohanty, 2003). It reminds us that the local and the global are interrelated and mutually supportive. Such a comparative framework also accepts the intersections of race, class, nation, gender, and sexuality; and an analysis of the different, intertwining, historical experiences of oppression. At the same time, this view involves examining the potential for solidarity and mutuality in struggle, at individual and global levels. Thus, the tasks of feminists should be constantly re-imagined by “transcending the conceptual borders inherent in the old cartographies” (Shohat, 2001, p. 1272), and by reaching across national borders and other boundaries to create mutual support.

Review Questions

What is an objection to the idea of a “universalized” woman (select all that apply)?

- It includes women all over the world
- Its focus on Western, middle-class women excludes women from other groups
- It mirrors the patriarchal idea of a universal male, which is the norm, with everyone else as “others”



Although both concepts recognize the oppression of women and advocate for change, what is the primary difference between Morgan’s concept of “universal sisterhood” and Crenshaw’s concept of “intersectionality”?

- Morgan’s concept focuses on the Global South, while Crenshaw’s focuses on the Global North
- Morgan’s theory posits that women are a uniform group, whereas Crenshaw’s theory focuses on the differences in their situations
- “Intersectionality” focuses on race and socioeconomic status, while “universal sisterhood” focuses on war and domestic violence
- “Universal sisterhood” is out of date, whereas “intersectionality” is new
- “Intersectionality” refers only to women of color, while “universal sisterhood” refers to all women



What are some of the issues women from the Global South focused on during the first UN Conference in 1975?

- Poverty and war
- Reproductive rights
- Equality
- None of the above



What are some examples of transnational feminist mobilization (select all that apply)?

The World March of Women against Poverty and Violence

SlutWalk

Ni Una Menos

Greenham Common



What are some advantages of the new technological forms of activism (select all that apply)?

The potential audience is global

The Internet is universally accessible

Messages can be disseminated rapidly



The interactive version of this H5P content is available at:

<https://open.oregonstate.education/resistinggenderviolence/?p=292#h5p-15>

Answer key: 1. a. and c., 2. b., 3. a., 4. all of the above, 5. a. and c.

Questions for Reflection

1. Various forms of privilege can obscure differences between women and make it harder for people of different perspectives to engage in feminist spaces. *How does your social context influence your perceptions of race, class, and gender?* In your context, what are the formal and informal norms that perpetuate privilege in feminist movements?
2. How do Western frameworks of gender violence often reinforce stereotypes and fail to account for cultural relativism, particularly in their tendency to focus on violence abroad, while excusing domestic violence? Why is it important to adopt a transnational feminist approach to understanding gender violence that resists centering Western ideological perspectives? Discuss the implications of this approach for analyzing gender violence globally and challenging the dominant narratives upheld by the US settler-state.
3. The wave framework of feminism divides the movement into distinct phases (first, second, third, fourth) that are largely centered around Western feminist efforts and moments in history. How does this framework obscure global feminist movements, particularly in the Global South? What are the consequences of focusing on a wave model in discussions of feminist history?

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Further Learning

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Notes

1. The transformation of the 1990s was particularly influenced by three economic and political transformations that took place both nationally and globally. The first was the transition from Keynesian economic policies (with their emphasis on state intervention to achieve full employment and the welfare of citizens) to the neo-liberal economic order (with its emphasis on the free market, privatization, and trade and financial liberalization), together with a new international division of labor based on women's labor. The second is the slow decline of the welfare state in all First World countries and the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment in many Third World countries, both of which have taken a heavy toll on women's reproduction and the management of domestic roles. Third, the emergence of various forms of fundamentalism and right-wing religious move-

ments that threaten women's autonomy and human rights.

2. On November 1, 1961, an estimated 50,000 women in 60 U.S. cities answered a call to join a one-day strike with the rallying slogan "End the Arms Race—Not the Human Race." After less than two years of activity, the movement shared a significant victory when the Limited Test Ban Treaty, banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere and outer space and under water, entered into force on October 11, 1963 (Swerdlow, 1993).
3. From September 1981, for almost 20 years, women from around the UK and beyond descended on Berkshire against the storage of American nuclear missiles on UK common land. The first women arrived on the 3rd of September, 36 having had marched all the way from Cardiff. Others joined them on the way, and over the years that followed, many thousands joined them. Together, they created the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, an exclusively female space; and they thrived together, pushing those watching to question war, violence, sexual orientation, and gender roles (Roseneil, 1995).
4. The Association of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo formed in 1977 in Argentina to seek the restitution of more than 400 children kidnapped or born in captivity during the 1976–1983 dictatorship (Arditti & Brinton-Lykes, 1992).
5. The pro-choice and gender activism in various Latin American countries, including Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil, highlights the ongoing issue of high rates of femicide in the region, despite the establishment of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women by the Organization of American States in 1994. According to data from the UNDP & UN Women, 14 of the 25 highest rates of femicide globally were in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017.

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Whitney Archer-Jones (they/she) is a feminist scholar-practitioner committed to fostering student development and institutional change. Whitney holds a Masters of Arts in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies as well as a Masters of Education in College Student Services Administration with a specialization in identity exploration and development. They are currently a full-time higher education administrator and PhD candidate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Whitney's current research areas include white supremacy in higher education, feminist pedagogy, and institutional change; and their doctoral research is focused on anti-racist feminist praxis in campus-based women and gender equity centers. Whitney is a proud parent, and parenthood has deepened their understanding of systems of oppression and cycles of socialization. Their children remind them that a better world is not only possible but is worth fighting to build.



Patti Duncan

Patti Duncan is a professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. She is the author of *Tell This Silence: Asian American Women Writers and the Politics of Speech*, and co-editor of *Mothering in East Asian Communities: Politics and Practices*; *Women's Lives Around the World: a Global Encyclopedia*; and *Women Worldwide: Transnational Feminist Perspectives* (2nd ed.). Since 2016 she has served as editor of *Feminist Formations*.



Maria Franco

Maria Franco is Professor in the Department of Geosciences at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), Brazil. Coordinator of the Paraíba Section of the Centre for the Study of Labour Geography (CEGeT) and founding member of the Gender, Labour and Territory Studies Centre (CEGeTT). Her research interests are territorial and environmental conflicts, rural social movements and women.



Shannon Garvin

Shannon Garvin received her doctoral degree from George Fox University. She has worked as an ordained minister, community organizer, graduate educator, mother, caregiver, and co-founded a sustainable farming initiative in Africa. She is passionate about people's ability to learn and grow while focused on attending to the Common Good for all members of society. She enjoys research and deep learning in new fields of study as well as coffee and writing projects with old friends. She has contributed to a number of books recently, including: *Women in Religion* (2021), *Women Worldwide* (2021), and *Gendered Voices Feminist Visions* (2022). Her children are young adults now and she lives in her native Oregon where she still enjoys the rain, mud puddles, long walks on the beach, growing berries, and showy gardens of spring and summer flowers.



Razan Ghazzawi

Razan Ghazzawi (they/them/هي\هن) is an award-winning human rights activist, former political prisoner, and recovering blogger. They are an assistant professor in the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University's School of Languages, Culture, and Society. A MESA Global Academy fellow for 2024-2025, Ghazzawi's writing has appeared in ARTE, Al Jazeera English, the Middle East Journal for Culture and Communication, and Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research. Currently, they are working on their first monograph, an ethnographic study of sexuality politics in Syria and Lebanon, examining its intersections with revolutions, the "war on terror," and the "refugee crisis" from south-south perspectives.



Meena Gopal

Meena Gopal teaches at the Centre for Women's Studies at Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India. Prior to this she was Professor at the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, TISS, Mumbai, till 2023. Gender and labour, bodily cultures; sports studies, political economy of health, welfare and development; sexuality studies and social movements. Her training is in interdisciplinary social sciences in health, labour and development. She has written and published on themes of women in the worlds of labour, sports studies in India, gender migration and labour; home based industry in south Tamil Nadu; queer and feminist politics; intersectionality; social reproduction. Even prior to being part of women's studies in the academy, she has been active in feminist collectives for gender and queer rights in India.



Finn Johnson

Finn Johnson is a queer and transgender PhD Candidate in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. His research is centered on the intersections of white Christian nationalist and white extremist movements with anti-transgender legislation in the United States. His other areas of research include critical race theory, critical legal studies, transgender and queer studies, feminist media analysis, and LGBTQIA+ STEM research.



Virginija Jurėnienė

Virginija Jurėnienė is a professor at Vilnius University Kaunas Faculty in Lithuania. She is a member of the Vilnius University Senate. She has served as an expert in gender issues for the European Institute for Gender Equality and the Lithuania Culture Council. She has published about 60 articles and five monographs on the issues of cultural organizations management and women's movements history in international peer reviewed journals.



Kamalaveni

Kamalaveni is Associate Professor at the Centre for Women’s Studies, Pondicherry University, Tamil Nadu, India specializing in reproductive health and gender issues. She holds a doctorate in Women’s Studies and she served as the principal investigator for research projects funded by organizations such as the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and the National Commission for Women. Her extensive academic contributions included over 50 published papers, guidance for six Ph.D. and 55 PG scholars. She has participated in 35 seminars, workshops, conferences, orientation programs, refresher courses, and training programs to enhance her academic expertise. Additionally, she has served as a resource person for 250 events, addressing over 30,000 college students, 2,500 school students, 1,000 rural women, and 750 college teachers. She has also demonstrated remarkable leadership by organising 42 seminars and conferences. Dr. Kamalaveni received several awards, including the “Young Educator and Scholar”, “Best Young Faculty Award”, and “Young Scientist” accolades. She served as the Indian lead for an international ERASMUS project on violence against women in 2022-23, collaborating with University of Santiago De Compostella, Spain.



Elizabeth Kennedy

Elizabeth Kennedy (she/her) is a gender-based violence prevention educator and strategist as well as a PhD student in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. Her research focuses on cultivating a love ethic as a foundational framework to transform university practices and policies related to gender-based violence prevention efforts. Elizabeth believes prevention is possible when it is rooted in community engagement, situated in the larger context of liberatory praxis, and centers the lived experiences of marginalized survivors.



Rebecca J. Lambert

Rebecca J. Lambert has always been fascinated by the way people connect, communicate, and create change—whether in the streets, the classroom, or a lively discussion. With a Ph.D. and Master’s in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, her academic research explored feminist activism and affect theory, uncovering how emotions shape movements and inspire collective action.

But her expertise isn’t just theoretical—she’s worked across public, private, and nonprofit sectors, bringing her passion for equity, advocacy, and community-building to diverse spaces. Whether developing programs, leading workshops, or coordinating initiatives, she’s always been drawn to work that strengthens human connection.



Now, as the Social Director at a senior living community, she’s traded lecture halls for lively community rooms, curating events, fostering friendships, and ensuring every day is filled with joy and engagement. In this role, she curates experiences that keep minds sharp, spirits high, and friendships thriving. From intergenerational storytelling projects to themed social hours she believes that joy and engagement are just as vital as scholarship and activism.

Janet Lockhart

Janet Lockhart is a retired educator. Over the years, she has worked on many projects with Susan Shaw, including *Women’s Lives around the World: A Global Encyclopedia*, winner of the 2018 American Book Fest Award in Women’s Issues; *Women and Religion: Global Lives in Focus*; and *Women Worldwide: Transnational Feminist Perspectives*. These days, she writes and edits on a freelance basis, enjoys checking items off her bucket list, and aspires to finish every book on her “to be read” pile.



Laura Pallarés Ameneiro

Laura Pallarés Ameneiro holds a PhD in Geography from the University of Santiago de Compostela (2019). She is a specialist in Gender Geography, researcher and professor at the Public University of Cape Verde (Uni-CV) since 2022. She completed her first postdoc at Uni-CV focused on the field of gender, violence and prostitution (2022). She is currently finishing her second postdoctorate, focusing on the analysis of Cape Verdean masculinity within prostitution and its link with the violence within it. At the same time, she collaborates in the research group TEAM since 2021, belonging to the University of Santiago de Compostela, participating in projects with rural issues, violence and gender.



Jayamala Mayilsamy

Jayamala Mayilsamy began teaching in 2005 and is presently an Associate Professor at the Centre for Women's Studies, PSGR Krishnammal College for Women in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. Jayamala earned her PhD in Sociology, focusing on the ecological study of crime in the Coimbatore region. She also focused on feminist research and teaching. Jayamala has received research funds from the University Grants Commission, the National Commission for Women, and, most recently, the Department of Science and Industrial Research to support women's skill development. She is the coordinator in her college for the PMKVY 4.0 skill hub initiatives scheme, by the National Skill Development Corporation. She has supervised numerous outreach projects, and as regional coordinator, she has led UGC-funded capacity building workshops for women managers in higher education throughout Tamil Nadu. She has also organised national and international conferences on women's studies. She has organised and co-led student study abroad programs in the United States and India. She has produced book chapters, published research articles in journals, and presented at national and international conferences.



Pavitra

Pavitra is a passionate individual with a deep-rooted interest in Psychology. She holds a Degree in Psychology as well as a Master's Degree in Psychosocial Rehabilitation and has dedicated her career to the field of Human Resources, working in various esteemed companies in Bangalore, Karnataka. Her journey led her to NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences, Bangalore), where she served as a Project Manager, contributing to impactful projects in the areas of Mental Health and Rehabilitation during Disasters. Currently, Pavitra is pursuing her PhD in the Department of Women's studies at Bharathiar University in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, furthering her knowledge and expertise. With a strong academic background and hands-on experience in the field, Pavitra is committed to making a difference in the lives of others through her work and research.



She is tenacious and passionate about her research involving Sex Workers, and she enjoys teaching students at the university. She enjoys reading extensively, holding in-depth discussions about various issues and writing.

Jaya Phookan

Jaya Phookan has been on the faculty of the Department of Women's Studies, Barkatullah University, Bhopal, India, for nearly 20 years. She previously worked as a senior research fellow in the Indian Institute for Forest Management in Bhopal. She has extensive field-based experience in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. She has served as a resource person for many gender sensitization training workshops and conferences. She has developed modules for IGNOU on gender-related courses. She was recently selected for training by the National Institute of Metal Health and Neurosciences. Bengaluru as a lead trainer for "Counselors of One-Stop Centers" to address gender-based violence and mental health. She has published five books and many research papers on women-related issues.



Zenetta Rosaline

Zenetta Rosaline holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture and a master's and PhD in management. She worked in industry for six years and then moved to university teaching in 2006. She is Professor and Director, Department of Women's Studies, at Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. She has guided five MPhil scholars and six PhD Scholars, published 24 international articles and 15 national articles, edited 12 books and two book chapters, and written one book – *Her Smile*.



Xosé M. Santos

Xosé M. Santos is full professor of Human Geography at the University of Santiago de Compostela-Spain. His main lines of research are focused towards tourism and rural studies. He has numerous publications on rural development and the problems associated with depopulation and marginalization in rural areas. He also researches on gender-based violence and LGBTQIA+ people, with special concern for the invisibility of such violence. He has organized courses and international conferences on these topics and has participated in doctoral thesis committees. He has a wide network of international relations in countries such as Brazil, Japan, Mexico, India, Canada and the United States, as well as many other countries in Europe. He has promoted teaching and research projects related to violence against rural women.



Susan M. Shaw

Susan M. Shaw is professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. She is the author of numerous books, including *Surviving God: A New Vision of God through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors* with Grace Ji-Sun Kim. She is also the editor of a number of books, including a four-volume encyclopedia on women's lives worldwide and a reference book on women and religion around the world. She is co-author of the introductory WGSS textbook, *Gendered Lives, Feminist Visions*. She has been PI on two National Science Foundation ADVANCE grants totaling over \$5 million. She loves to lead study abroad, especially in the UK where she focuses on British crime fiction and crime dramas. She has also taken students to Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Spain. Her current project is a book for academics on how to retire, to be published by Princeton University Press in 2026.



Mehra Shirazi

Mehra Shirazi is an associate professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Oregon State University. Shirazi is a bicultural, bilingual, community-engaged scholar. Her work is grounded in decolonial feminist scholarship that focuses on health in the global context of race, gender, immigration, and the environment. Shirazi's scholarship also addresses transnational praxis and pedagogy through critical studies of culture, lived experience, and narratives of decolonization. Shirazi's work has been published in the *Journal of International Women's Health*, *Journal of Psycho-Oncology*, the *Journal of Religion and Health*, *Progress in Community Health Partnerships*, and *Narrative Inquiry in Bioethics*, *Films for the Feminist Classroom*, and *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture, and Social Justice*.



Asha Shukla

Asha Shukla is a distinguished academician with over 31 years of research and 34 years of teaching experience, specializing in Teacher Education, Women's Studies, and Hindi Literature. She served as the Vice Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, Mhow, M.P. from 2018 to 2022, and held additional charge as Vice Chancellor of Maharshi Panini University, Ujjain. Prof. Shukla is the Chief Editor of the "Asha Paras International Journal of Gender Studies" and the "Asha Paras International Multidisciplinary Research Journal," and has also edited the "Journal Of Gender Equality and Sensitivity." Her expertise encompasses academic administration, women's empowerment, gender sensitization, tribal women's issues, and literature. With a prolific record of 28 books and 60 research papers, she has guided 21 PhD scholars, 20 M.Phil candidates, and 30 M.Ed dissertations. Prof. Shukla has participated in international conferences in the USA, Japan, Taiwan, Surinam, and Thailand. She has been a member of several academic and governmental bodies, including UGC, NAAC, NCTE, and ICSSR, and has chaired NAAC peer teams. She is also a former Brand Ambassador for Swachata Abhiyan and has received notable awards such as the Vishisht Shiksha Sevi Samman and Nayika Award.



Giovanna Vingelli

Giovanna Vingelli holds a PhD from the University of Calabria (2004). She is a feminist sociologist and Senior Researcher and Assistant Professor of Gender Studies, Rector's Delegate for Equal Opportunities and Director of the Centre for Women's Studies at the University of Calabria, Spain. Her research interests lie in the areas of analysis, development and design of gender equality policies (gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and education), gender-based violence and social movements (feminist and anti-feminist movements). Her most recent research focuses on anti-feminist movements in Italy, their discourse and strategies, and their connection with the Italian and international far right.

