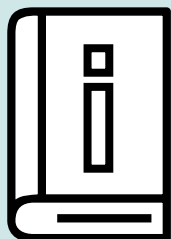


SANS
VIOLENCE
FREE

Sexual violence, systems of power and intersectionality



Informational document

Topics covered

The concept of intersectionality

Realities of certain marginalized groups with respect to disclosures of sexual violence and barriers to support services

Target audience

CEGEP employees

Sexual violence resource personnel

Intervention workers from different fields



An initiative by:



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Graphic design by:



PART 1

Systems of power and intersectionality

RECOGNIZING THE DIFFERENT SYSTEMS OF POWER

Power dynamics (systems of power or oppression) lead to systemic and social barriers for various marginalized groups. Marginalized social groups are generally perceived and treated as inferior to the dominant group, which can vary depending on the context.

The following table attempts to highlight different systems of oppression that exist within western societies, as well as the social groups that face systemic barriers due to these power systems.

Warning : The table is by no means comprehensive. Several social groups could be added to the table or could have been subdivided into less restrictive categories.

SYSTEMS OF POWER OR OPPRESSION	OPPRESSED SOCIAL GROUPS	
Ageism	1	Children
	2	Adolescents
	3	Elderly
Ableism	4	People with a physical disability
	5	People with an intellectual disability
	6	People living with mental illness
	7	People deemed as fat/overweight
Cissexism / Cisgenderism	8	Transgender people
	9	Non-binary people
Colonialism	10	Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)
	11	Immigrants or independent refugees
	12	Immigrants or refugees by joint assistance or sponsorship
	13	People without status
Heterosexism	14	Homosexual, bisexual or pansexual people
	15	Asexual people
Racism	16	Racialized people (Black, Latin, Asian, Arabic, etc.)
	17	Non-Catholic people (Jewish, Muslim, etc.)

Understanding intersectionality

Being aware of the surrounding power systems is essential for understanding some of the inequalities and oppressions experienced by certain groups of people. However, the reality of how these power systems can affect a person's life is much more complex. Many people exist within several marginalized social groups and therefore at the intersection of multiple systems of oppression.

The term “**intersectionality**” was introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist legal scholar and writer. The term represents the reality of simultaneously experiencing various forms of oppression. It also encompasses the idea that systems of oppression are interconnected, that they feed off each other and must therefore be fought in the same breath, without prioritization.

What the concept of intersectionality tries to emphasize is the multiplication of various experiences of oppression, and not the simple addition of discriminatory acts experienced independently. The interwoven and compounding impacts of various power systems can create positions of vulnerability for certain people who exist at the crossroads of numerous systemic oppressions.

Better understanding through examples

A relevant example to better understand the concept of intersectionality is that of the lawsuit against General Motors in 1976 by a group of Black women who stated that the company was guilty of race and gender discrimination in its hiring/firing practices due to the fact that Black women were laid off in droves, and rarely hired. The case was dismissed by the judge however, since General Motors continued to employ Black men and White women, which was interpreted as proof that the company was not guilty of either form of discrimination.

For more information about the case, see Kimberlé Crenshaw explain the concept of intersectionality in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BnAW4NyOak>

PART 2

Sexual violence and power systems

RECOGNIZING THE OVERLAP OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SYSTEMS OF POWER

Perpetrators of sexual violence often see their targets as “someone who is not their equal.” Systems of oppression thus constitute groups of people who often fall under this perception.

Although sexual violence is often rooted in gender inequality, many other social inequalities persist and have been found to be just as important in analyzing the issue.

The table below sheds light on some of the effects of systemic oppressions on issues surrounding sexual violence. It is important to note that one person can find themselves inextricably caught in the intersection of several systems of oppression, thus creating a distinctive experience.

Warning:

In terms of sexual violence, the rate of victimization of women in each group is often presented as being highest. It should be mentioned that men, transgender and non-binary people in these groups can also be victims of sexual violence, to different degrees. However, there is very little data on this topic. The information in the table must therefore be considered with circumspection.

CHARACTERISTICS		EFFECTS RELATIVE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE	POTENTIALLY AFFECTED SOCIAL GROUPS
Isolation	➡	A low number of witnesses able to identify signs of violence / victimization	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13.
Dependence on others	➡	A significant additional barrier to disclosure	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 13.
Unlikely to disclose	➡	Recurring episodes of sexual violence	1, 3, 4, 5, 13.
Accumulation of stressors (stigmatization, teasing, etc.)	➡	More significant impacts following an episode of sexual violence	4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.
Stigmatization	➡	Less support	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17*.
Risks connected to disclosure	➡	Creation of even more precarious situations (for the survivor and/or perpetrator)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.
Belief that these people have no/little sexuality	➡	Denial that these people could be subject to sexual violence	3, 4, 5, 7.
Belief that these people are not attractive	➡	No consideration for the lack of consent of these people during intimate relations	3, 4, 7.
*This also applies to men who have experienced SV.			

By combining the knowledge and resources from a variety of organizations, it is possible to more broadly consider the difficulties and systemic barriers experienced by several marginalized groups. It is thus important to implement processes that respect intersectional realities when developing prevention, intervention and advocacy strategies revolving around sexual violence. Intersectional approaches within sexual violence support and prevention efforts make it more possible to respond appropriately to the needs of all.

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APPENDIX 1

Resources to delve a little deeper

Videos

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW ON INTERSECTIONALITY – THE BIG IDEA

Kimberlé Crenshaw explains what intersectionality is and how it was conceived.

Source: The Institute of Art and Ideas (2021). The Big Idea | Kimberle Crenshaw on Intersectionality. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BnAW4NyOak>

INTERSECTIONNALITÉ 101 / INTERSECTIONALITY 101 - FIERTÉ MONTRÉAL

Bilingual video (audio and subtitled) that explains intersectionality using examples.

Source: Fierté Montréal (2021). Intersectionnalité 101 / Intersectionality 101 [video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLlcco5SD_Y

QUAND LA VIOLENCE SEXUELLE DISCRIMINE ! - CALACS OUEST-DE-L'ÎLE

Bilingual video (audio and subtitled) presenting poems on sexual violence by a variety of different people.

Source : CALACS WIC. (2018). Quand la violence sexuelle discrimine! [vidéo]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJiUg0EyuBI>

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY? – NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

Video explaining further nuances about intersectionality and the compounding impacts of dominant power systems.

Source: Hopkins, P. (2018). What is intersectionality? YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1isIM0ytkE>

VIOLENCE FREE WEBSITE - YWCA MONTREAL

For detailed definitions of sexual violence, specific resources for certain social groups and ready-made activity sheets, visit the website for YWCA Montreal's Violence Free project. <https://www.ydesfemmesmtl.org/en/violence-free/>

APPENDIX 2

Factsheet – Sexual violence and intersectional realities

Homeless youth - 37.4% of young women and 41.3% of transgender and non-binary youth are victims of sexual assault as compared to 8.2% of young men. (1)

6X - Homosexual or bisexual people report having been subject to sexual assault at a rate that is six times higher than that experienced by heterosexual people. (2)

Gender and disability (3)

2X - Men with a disability are twice as likely to be subject to sexual assault than men without a disability.

3X - Women without a disability are three times more likely to be victims of sexual assault than men without a disability.

13X - Women with a disability are thirteen times more likely to be victims of sexual assault than men without a disability.

3X - People who were subject to sexual violence during their childhood present a rate of sexual victimization as adults that is three times higher than people who were not victims of sexual violence during their childhood. (3)

3X - The rate of sexual assault is three times higher among Indigenous women as compared to non-Indigenous women. (4)

BARRIERS TO CHANGE		
CHARACTERISTICS	(LEADS TO)	EFFECTS RELATED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE
The vital need for love during childhood	➡	A reflex to justify and normalize the sexual violence that they are exposed to
Normal risk-taking during adolescence	➡	Increased feelings of guilt when subject to sexual violence
Trivializing the takeover of Indigenous Lands	➡	Taking possession of Indigenous bodies goes unpunished
Language barrier or lack of vocabulary to name sexual violence	➡	An additional barrier to disclosure
Failure to consider sexualities other than heterosexual	➡	Legitimizes sexual violence to “force” someone to be heterosexual
Sexual stereotypes and clichés regarding racialized or non-Catholic people	➡	Failure to consider their individual desires and limits
Belief that men are superior and stronger	➡	Denial that men are victims of sexual violence

References – Factsheet

Statistics vary from place to place, based on the terms and methods used.
For more information, go straight to the references mentioned below.

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