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# Developing an Intersectional Approach to Training on Sexual Harassment, Violence and Hate Crimes

**Guide for Training Facilitators**

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This document offers guidance to training facilitators on how to incorporate intersectionality into existing trainings on bystander intervention and first response to disclosures of violence. This is not meant as a separate training programme in and of itself, but rather to enhance the presentation of existing trainings. It explains what intersectionality is and suggests how to frame training intersectionally, as well as particular activities facilitators can use. This guidance has been developed as a result of conducting a series of focus groups with key informants: student liberation officers and university staff. These focus groups discussed how differences between individuals and their proximity to and risk of experiencing violence might influence their ability to safely intervene.

This guidance will be most helpful when used in conjunction with the intensive versions of training. However, we understand that time constraints may not allow for this. In our focus groups, we learned that when universities abridge trainings, existing sections on intersectionality are often the first to be cut. We would encourage you to try to take an intersectional approach to addressing violence, regardless of the length of the training.

### **What is intersectionality?**

When we talk about intersectionality, we're talking about how structures in society position people to either be powerful (less likely to face discrimination or oppression) or more vulnerable (more likely to face discrimination or oppression). Power dynamics – such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, immigration status, disability, and more are involved in these power relations. Intersectionality recognises that these are not distinct and separate realms of experience and can intersect with other forms of differentiation such as economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential (Brah and Phoenix 2004). Therefore, all of these aspects of lived experience interlock and overlap to create unique lived experiences of oppression and privilege. This occurs on a structural level (for instance, in government policy) and on an interpersonal level (for instance, prejudice against marginalised groups). It does not mean that people with more structural power (e.g. a heterosexual, middle-class, White British man) have never experienced personal hardships, only that these hardships are not related to their social positioning.

Intersectionality is a term originally put forward by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain the overlapping issues experienced by black women. In her 1989 paper 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex', Crenshaw cited the case of five black women who sued General Motors for employment discrimination, but lost because the company claimed they did not discriminate by gender (because white women were not discriminated against) or race (because black men were not either). The black women in this case, positioned at the intersections of 'woman' and 'black', were not recognised by the law as a unique group and so were not able to defend their rights. This intersectional discrimination applies in other areas, and to other categories of people, as well.

## Why use intersectionality as a framework for training on bystander intervention or first response to disclosures of sexual violence and hate crime?

- Power dynamics influence everything in our lives, and that includes intervention and disclosure responses. Using an intersectional lens may help to better meet the needs of particular groups who are or have experienced forms of violence. This guide begins with the recognition that due to these power relations, people are not equally able to intervene in the same ways to stop or prevent acts of violence. These differences also influence the ability (and opportunity) for people to disclose experiences of violence to others.
- For example, a black person may have more difficulty challenging a white person's racism against another person of colour because they are also vulnerable to that type of violence.
- Black women and other women of colour are also often more reluctant to disclose violence against them by men in their communities, because they do not want to contribute to racist stereotypes and they know men of colour are treated more harshly in the criminal justice system (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1257).
- A woman may have more difficulty or be less safe challenging a man's violent act than another man may be in intervening.
- A cisgender person may be in a safer position to challenge an act of transphobia than a trans or non-binary person.
- Female students with female dating partners in lesbian, bisexual, or otherwise non-heterosexual relationships may have a more difficult time telling their university about violence in their relationship, due to assumptions about women's roles as victims rather than perpetrators of violence.

## How should we employ intersectionality in our training?

- The simplest way to ensure your training is using an intersectional framework is to frame it around the idea that all people experience violence, intervention and disclosure in different ways. We therefore cannot use a one-size-fits-all approach.
- You do not have to explicitly name and define "intersectionality" – as long as you continually emphasise dynamics of power and vulnerability, you'll be on the right track.
- Below you'll find more specific advice on how to incorporate intersectional forms of violence and power relations in bystander intervention and first response training.

### Intersectionality in Bystander Intervention

Get those participating in training to think about the specific ways in which they would either feel comfortable or uncomfortable intervening in acts of violence. What makes them (un)comfortable? The most typical reasons for not intervening include not noticing the event, not interpreting it as high-risk, not feeling personally responsible for intervening, and not having the necessary skills (Latané and Darley, 1969).

Some people may put themselves more at risk than others by intervening. Through our focus groups, participants raised the issue of **shared vulnerability**: If a person may be hurt or injured when intervening because they share something with the victim—for instance, that they are both trans or they are both disabled—then it can be more difficult to intervene, and the violence they face when intervening may have a lasting impact. One student shared with us, *"If someone is homophobic to my boyfriend and I stop it, I am reeling from that attack as much as he is because it's affecting me as well."*

University of Albany's School of Social Welfare has designed an activity on intersectionality that aims to make people aware of their own positioning in society. You could begin by offering your own background. What characteristics intersect within your own life, and how have they affected your life? This might in turn help to make training participants more comfortable in thinking about what characteristics intersect within them.

You could also combine this discussion with some scenarios, with victims and perpetrators of violence and potential interveners with different characteristics, to explore how these might either facilitate or hinder intervention. For instance, in a case of Islamophobic verbal abuse against a Muslim woman, perpetrated by a mixed-gender group of white people: would it be easier to intervene as a fellow Muslim or as a non-Muslim person? Would gender and race also come into it? What about age or disability?

### **Intersectionality in Responding to Disclosures of Violence**

Disclosing experiences of sexual violence is an intensely vulnerable act, yet this can be easier or more difficult for certain people based on their identities, positioning in society, and the type of violence they have experienced. The support and response offered should be tailored to the individual disclosing.

In the focus groups we conducted, a staff member told us that students may be less likely to disclose *“if they feel as if actually they are on their own, or they feel isolated with a particular incident.”* One potential cause of isolation is students not seeing themselves reflected in the available support staff (e.g. a student of colour may want to speak to a staff member of colour). Another is perceived indifference, ignorance, or judgment from academic or support staff based on the student’s identity or position (for instance, trans students or students who are selling sex).

We have created an activity to help your attendees understand how positioning affects disclosure. Using notecards, list out possible identity characteristics, with one characteristic per notecard. These can either be umbrella categories (gender, race, visible disability, invisible disability, sexual orientation, religion, immigration status, class) or you can break them down to be more specific (e.g. gender–nonbinary; race–black British; etc.) and continue until you’ve covered the characteristics most common in the population at the university you’re training. Put all notecards in a bag or box. Then pick out two or three cards and ask those participating in the training to discuss how the intersection of these characteristics may affect a student’s experience of disclosing sexual violence. You can prompt people with questions like:

- What potential barriers might this student face when disclosing violence?
- What kind of response/s should you give in order to appropriately support this student?
- What resources on and off campus should you know about in order to best support this student?

Depending on the size of your session, you can do this activity with everyone participating or break into smaller groups and then reconvene to debrief.

### **Understanding the Diversity of Violent Acts**

Just as our social positioning affects dynamics of intervention and disclosure, it also affects the experience of violence itself. This could take several forms, but two we will focus on are the need to recognise verbal harassment as violence and how hate crime can overlap with sexual violence.

### **Recognising Non-Physical Violence as Violence**

It is important to recognise that violence is not always a physical act, and that violence can occur over prolonged periods of time. Microaggressions and verbal harassment are still violence, even if they do not leave a visible mark. Because they are less noticed, they may also occur repeatedly. People marginalised in more than one way (for instance, on both gender and sexual orientation lines) are much more likely to experience microaggressions than people with more structural power. These forms of violence can have long term impacts or may not seem directly connected, such as ill health, poor attendance, and impacts to student marks or career progression.

A useful way to discuss this point—especially in the context of bystander intervention—is to show a pyramid of violence, with prejudicial beliefs and attitudes at the bottom, verbal harassment in the middle, and physical violence (up to rape and murder) at the point, which is included as a handout in session 2 of The Intervention Initiative’s toolkit.

- You can raise how acts at the bottom of the pyramid—such as prejudicial beliefs and microaggressions—can have a cumulative effect over time, which is still dehumanising even if the aggressor does not escalate into physical violence.
- You can also discuss how this cumulative trauma from acts at the bottom of the pyramid can intensify the trauma of more 'serious' forms of violence and make it harder to recover.
- You can explore how letting 'less serious' forms of violence go unchallenged can create a conducive context for 'more serious' forms of violence.
- This leads to the final key point – that intervention at the bottom of the pyramid can prevent the escalation of violence to the top and contribute to positive cultural change.

During our focus groups, one of the students emphasised how meaningful these small interventions can be: *"You don't have to be the person that physically gets between a group of people if something very serious is going to happen...it is enough to just start being, like, 'you can't joke like that anymore; you can't say those things in the pub,' and treat it like that. You don't have to be a massive hero."*

## The Intersection of Sexual Violence and Hate Crime

**Sexual violence and hate crime are not mutually exclusive categories**, and if you are using an intersectional framework, your training should aim to include them both. The Crown Prosecution Service defines "hate crime" as "a range of criminal behaviour where the perpetrator is motivated by hostility or demonstrates hostility towards the victim's disability, race, religion, sexual orientation or transgender identity." When somebody commits an act of sexual violence against someone else *because* of one of those listed characteristics (e.g. against a disabled person because they are disabled, against a trans person because they are trans), that act is a hate crime.

Misogyny is often at the root of sexual violence. Nottinghamshire Police defines misogyny as "incidents against women that are motivated by the attitude of men towards women and includes behaviour targeted at women by men simply because they are women." Nottinghamshire Police has included this in their hate crime reporting since 2016, although this is not yet being implemented nationwide.

People marginalised in more than one way can experience hate crime that targets more than one characteristic. For instance, Muslim women can be targets of hate crime because they are Muslim *and* because they are women. At present, legal hate crime frameworks tend to focus on just one characteristic – they are not intersectional – but your training can be.

The intersection of sexual violence and hate crime is also pertinent to disclosure responses. When staff receive a disclosure of what appears to be an act of sexual violence, it may be helpful for the staff member to consider if it also constitutes a hate crime. Staff SHOULD NOT ask for details or question a student about the attack, but they may want to direct a student to additional resources, on or off campus, if they think the act of sexual violence may have also been motivated by prejudice based on one or more of their characteristics.

In your training, it could be useful to include a discussion of hate crime after you discuss the pyramid of violence: This serves as an easy transition and helps those participating in training to see the overlap between sexual violence and hate crime.

## Diversifying Scenarios

Intersectionality helps us to understand the diversity of violent acts that come under the banner of sexual violence, including microaggressions and hate crime. The participants in the focus groups that have informed the development of this guidance wanted to learn how to intervene in and respond to scenarios that varied in relation to different types of violence, categories of perpetrators, and categories of victims. Although sexual violence is committed predominantly by men towards women, it is helpful to remind people that anyone can be a victim or a perpetrator of violence, and that it happens in all communities.

Diversifying scenarios goes beyond issues of representation to address how we are able to recognise and respond to acts of violence *as violence*. If we only include scenarios of a (presumed white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied) man hurting a (presumed white, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied) woman, then we will struggle to identify perpetrators and victims who do not match those descriptions. For example, a student participant within one of our focus groups stated: *"I think that intimate partner violence and sexual violence is something that often gets overlooked in public when it's an abled person doing it to a disabled person, because it's very much seen as like there's only one person in that relationship with agency and whatever they're doing must be warranted."*

You could tailor the examples you use in training to match the population of university. For example, if there is a significant student population at risk of homophobic, transphobic, or Islamophobic violence, then you could include specific examples. It is also important to show examples of possible sexual violence that happen within relationships, as current and former sexual partners are the most common perpetrators of sexual violence in university settings.

## Police Involvement

Police involvement may or may not be a topic in your training depending on what you cover. If the role of the police does come up, an intersectional approach could tackle the relationship the police have with both sexual violence survivors and historically marginalised communities. This complicates the issue of police involvement, in both a bystander situation and a disclosure.

In some circumstances when there is a present and clear risk to others, the police may need to be called as a safeguarding measure. It is advisable in this situation to share only anonymised information pertinent to this risk, to protect the survivor from potentially unwanted police contact.

Survivors in abusive relationships often do not want to involve the police because they may want the violence to stop, but they do not necessarily want to get their partner in trouble. Police involvement can also cause domestic violence to escalate if the perpetrator is allowed to return home. Many survivors find police involvement retraumatising: as one of the students in our focus groups said, *"I don't want to go anywhere near the police, like, as a survivor and a marginalised person, the police are terrifying... And there really isn't anyone who seems to understand that if you're marginalised and if you've been a victim of something like this, you wouldn't want to make a report. There needs to be some sort of leeway and it doesn't... it shouldn't come down to the police."* If possible, leave the decision of whether or how to involve the police up to the survivor themselves.

Not all communities have good relationships with the police. Police misconduct, ranging from negligence to violence, occurs more often against historically marginalised communities (and especially against black people and other people of colour). Migrants may be hesitant to contact the police out of fear of deportation. One of our focus group participants stated: *"If I [call the police] am I going to be kicked out of this country?" So this kind of thing is always happening to me, so if I want to do something, if I've been through, like, any kind of hate crime... Sometimes for me, I really want to do something now, but on the other hand, I feel like would this affect me as [an] international [person] that [is] holding a visa."* Sex workers are also at risk of arrest for crimes such as 'brothel keeping' (which in the UK is defined as two or more sex workers working together for safety), if police are called.

We add this section to the guidance in recognition that the criminal justice system is not always straightforward to navigate or on the side of the victim/survivor.

We hope this information is helpful to you as you plan your training around bystander intervention and disclosure. We thank all the participants involved in the focus groups and interviews for sharing their views and experiences with us. This work and the production of this guidance was made possible through funding received from the HEFCE Catalyst Fund (Office for Students).

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