Intersectional Approaches to PSEAH

A Feminist and Anti-racist Guide and Resource for Organizations

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Resources to take care on your learning journey

- **Assaulted Women's Helpline:** https://www.awhl.org/ | 1-866-863-0511
- **Rape, Abuse & Incest National Networks (RAINN) Canada:** https://www.rainn.org/ | 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) and an online chat feature
- **Crisis Text Line:** https://www.crisistextline.org/ | Text CONNECT to 686868
- **National Victim Services Directory:** https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/victims-victimes/vsd-rsv/index.html

Content warning

This resource contains discussions of sensitive topics, including SEAH (sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment), as well as systemic issues related to power dynamics, oppression, racism, colonialism and discrimination within humanitarian and international development organizations. The content may be distressing or triggering for some individuals. Remember to take care of yourself and find healing spaces for recovery. If you require extra support, please see the highlighted resources.

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Introduction

The widespread issue of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) in international cooperation is both a human rights violation and a result of continuing colonial structures that undermine the efficacy and integrity of our work as practitioners. When SEAH occurs, it compromises trust in our initiatives and programming, harms the very communities we aim to support, and contradicts the fundamental principles of equity and respect that ought to guide our efforts. Although precise statistics are not readily available,[1] international humanitarian workers and local communities continuously identify SEAH as a prevalent issue that disproportionately affects women, girls, and gender-diverse people in their work. These circumstances place every made-vulnerable population we work with, including, but not limited to, 2SLGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, and ethnic and racial minorities, at risk.

Our work can benefit from "tools of understanding"[2] that navigate complex power dynamics that are exacerbated by colonial structures. We can refine our approaches by adopting intersectionality, a concept initially coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality is a methodological and analytical framework that examines intersecting modes of oppression emerging from various hierarchies of power. This resource acts as a tool for understanding intersectionality and a resource for how to implement intersectionality into efforts for the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH). Tailored for Canadian humanitarian and development organizations, this resource offers practical guidance on leveraging intersectionality to address SEAH. Beyond PSEAH, this resource provides insights into power dynamics that apply broadly across organizational contexts.

What does this resource include?

- Historical context and theoretical frameworks surrounding intersectionality as a Black feminist concept;
- Practical guidance on reflexivity and intersectionality in professional practice;
- Challenges and opportunities in implementing intersectional approaches;
- Worksheets, exercises, case studies and practical applications for advancing understanding of intersectionality and addressing SEAH within organizational structures and programs through an intersectional approach (Appendix 1); and
- Recommended readings and additional resources for further exploration (Appendix 3).

Learning Objectives

This resource was built as a practical tool to support staff learning in international cooperation organizations. This resource will help organizations and staff to:

- Define intersectionality and its historical roots in Black feminist thought;
- Analyze how intersectionality allows for a deeper understanding of power dynamics and oppression and examine how intersecting forms of oppression disproportionately affect vulnerable populations in international cooperation;
- Explore how intersectionality can inform context-specific, locally-led, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred approaches to PSEAH;
- Practice reflexivity by examining personal biases, power dynamics, and positionalities within the context of international cooperation; and

1. Accurate statistics are not available for several reasons, including underreporting, complex reporting mechanisms, lack of standardization, institutional culture and power dynamics, and limited resources.
2. Tools of understanding are methods, techniques, or resources that assist in comprehending, interpreting, or acquiring knowledge about a subject or situation.

- Promote discussion of strategies to overcome barriers to adopting an intersectional approach in international cooperation.

The examples provided within this resource are intentionally broad and fictionalized, designed to offer general rather than specific guidance. We recognize how this approach may inadvertently reproduce colonial narratives that oversimplify and homogenize diverse groups with distinct lived realities, cultures and approaches. With this in mind, these examples are intended as a guiding framework and should not be considered comprehensive or exhaustive. We encourage you to use them as a starting point, and, where appropriate, enrich them with specific, contextually relevant details in your work.

Why Intersectionality?

To understand our own positions within complex power hierarchies, we must first acknowledge that, **as a sector, we possess power and privilege derived from ongoing colonial structures in foreign aid, creating conditions that perpetuate sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, both in our international operations and within our organizational structures.**

Adopting an intersectional approach enriches our understanding of power dynamics, especially colonial power hierarchies, within our international programming and organizational structures. Through this lens, we can gain insights into addressing the ongoing prevalence of SEAH in international cooperation through recognizing and challenging oppressive norms and fostering honest, trauma-informed discussions about complex power hierarchies inherent in Global North development organizations (see Contextualizing the problem).

Approaching PSEAH through an intersectional lens requires grounding our understanding in both **anti-racist**[3] and **feminist**[4] perspectives. These frameworks offer essential analytical tools that allow us to comprehensively grasp and confront the intricate and interconnected realities of those most impacted by SEAH. Simultaneously, they provide a method for recognizing and dismantling the power dynamics perpetuating SEAH instances. An intersectional approach confronts the limitations of a "one-size-fits-all" solution to PSEAH and advocates for context-specific, locally-led, trauma-informed, and survivor-centered approaches. Intersectional approaches demand the central involvement of diverse local actors in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs tailored to their lived realities and unique needs. This inclusive approach not only deepens our understanding of power but also strengthens our capacity to develop transformative strategies for PSEAH.

Contextualizing the problem: The case of Peter Dalglish

Addressing SEAH with humility and transparency is fundamental in recognizing and understanding the power imbalances in organizational practices and programs. The actions of individuals in the sector, including those of Peter Dalglish, have compelled a deeper reflection and reinforced the necessity to prioritize PSEAH in international cooperation. Peter Dalglish, a Canadian, co-founded Street Kids International, an organization dedicated to aiding orphaned children. He took advantage of the inherent power imbalance in his position, exploiting the vulnerability of the children he was supposed to protect. In 2018, Dalglish was arrested and found guilty of raping two boys in Nepal. His case brought significant attention to the issue of SEAH within the humanitarian and international development sectors, highlighting the need for rigorous safeguarding and accountability measures. For a comprehensive analysis and understanding of incidents like the case of Peter Dalglish, organizations are encouraged to adopt an intersectional approach to PSEAH.

3. For a greater understanding of anti-racism in the sector, please consult Cooperation Canada's Anti-Racist Cooperation Hub: https://centre-arc-hub.ca/.
4. Feminism holds diverse meanings for different individuals. In this resource, we use a transnational and intersectional approach to feminism. To explore more about transnational feminism, consider reading: Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity. Duke University Press.

What is Intersectionality?

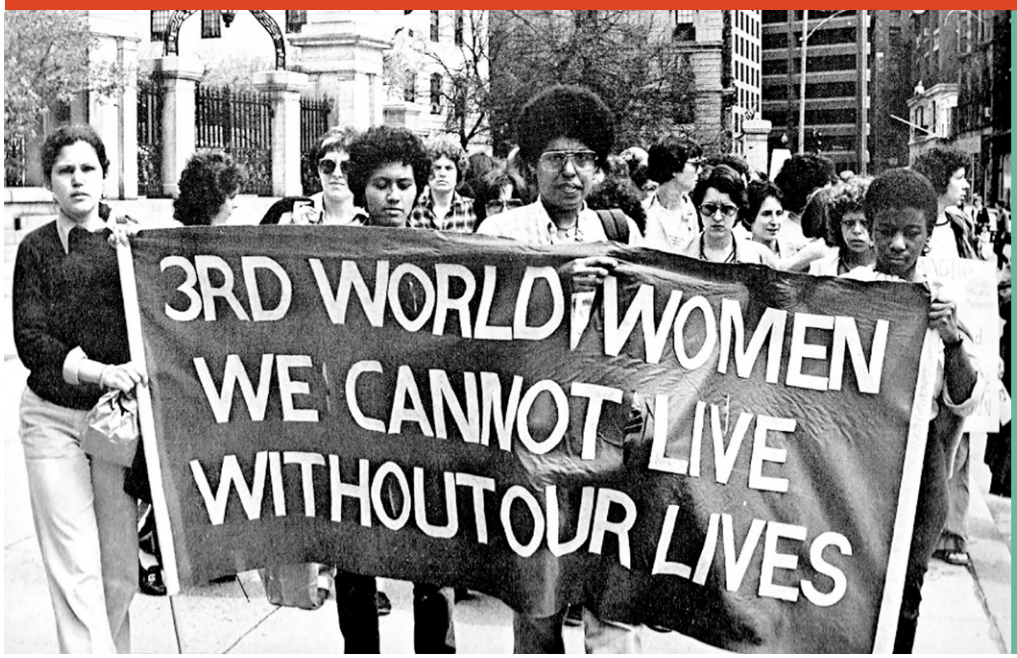
Intersectionality is a methodological and analytical framework that examines how different forms of oppression and privilege, including those based on race, gender, class, sexuality, caste, and religion, intersect and interact. These intersections generate distinct experiences of oppression that are shaped by hierarchical and vertical power structures. Further, an intersectional analysis rejects single-axis analyses by emphasizing that oppression is complex and non-static.

Intersectionality is not simply about intersecting identity categories. **Intersectionality is a methodological tool to analyze power and oppression within context-specific institutional structures. The goal of intersectionality is to address the underlying causes of oppression, not their symptoms.** Building on this foundation, it is imperative that we explore the origins of intersectionality through an anti-racist and feminist lens to use it effectively. This begins by acknowledging that "[i]ntersectionality as thought and practice is the fruit of the labour of racialized women"[5] (see The genealogy of "intersectionality"). This origin must be recognized and honoured in the adoption of intersectionality.

The genealogy of "intersectionality:" A black feminist concept

Most accounts of intersectionality typically start with Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal 1989 article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," where she first introduced the term. However, intersectionality as a mode of thinking extends further back, reaching into the 20th century with influential Black feminists like Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper. These liberators addressed how societal structures disproportionately impacted Black women.

The Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement also serves as a critical point in the genealogy of intersectional analysis and theorizing. The authors discussed the interrelated nature of sexism, racism and economic hierarchies. They asserted that "in the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving 'correct' political goals."



The combahee river collective, **source:** https://www.versobooks.com/en-ca/blogs/news/2866-the-combahee-river-collective-statement

5. Bilge, S. (2020). The fungibility of intersectionality: An Afropessimist reading. Ethnic and Racial Studies, 43(13), 2298-2326.

Unpacking Power Dynamics: Applying intersectionality to PSEAH

Following the pioneering work of 20th-century Black feminist liberators, Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to highlight the shortcomings of anti-discrimination laws in the United States, particularly in addressing the experiences of Black women. Black women were caught in a legal paradox, recognized only as "black people" or as "women," but not as individuals subject to discrimination precisely due to their intersecting identity as Black women. Consequently, the discriminatory experiences of Black women were often ignored unless they mirrored the experiences of white women or Black men. To explain this struggle, Crenshaw offered two analogies: "the Intersection" and "the Basement."

While intersectionality offers profound insights, we must be cautious of colonial misappropriations of its principles. Because intersectionality was originally coined without the explicit intention of addressing concerns such as SEAH, as we do this integrative work, it is essential to properly view intersectionality as a framework that must be expanded upon. The success of an intersectional approach is dependent on understanding its foundational objectives and bringing those into conversation with PSEAH efforts. To more effectively integrate an intersectional approach into PSEAH, organizations can explore how Crenshaw's *Intersection analogy* and the *Basement analogy* present distinct avenues for addressing the issue.[6]

The intersection analogy

"Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination… But it is not always easy to reconstruct an ·accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. In these cases the tendency seems to be that no driver is held responsible, no treatment is administered, and the involved parties simply get back in their cars and zoom away."

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW[7]

The Intersection analogy is a critical starting point for understanding the intricate dynamics of oppression and discrimination that individuals face. It acknowledges that discrimination, exploitation, abuse, and harassment are not solely experienced through one aspect of their identity but through the interconnected layers of various forms of oppression. For instance, someone's experience of discrimination may be shaped not only by their gender but also by their race, socioeconomic status, ability, sexuality, and other intersecting identities.

By embracing this intersectional perspective, it becomes evident that addressing discrimination and oppression requires a deeper understanding beyond surface-level categorizations. In preventing and responding to SEAH, applying the

6. Carastathis, A. (2013). Basements and intersections. Hypatia, 28(4), 698-715.
7. Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8, pp. 149.

Intersection analogy is invaluable for designing effective programs and policies. It allows for a more nuanced analysis of vulnerabilities within programming and organizational structures, enabling interventions that are responsive to the diverse needs and experiences of those affected by SEAH. Still, integrating an intersectional perspective extends far beyond simply acknowledging identity markers such as race, ability, gender, and sexuality. It involves delving deeper into how these various factors intersect and compound within societal power structures, shaping individuals' experiences of SEAH in intricate and multifaceted ways.

For example, imagine an organization where both a woman of colour with disabilities and a non-disabled white woman are employed in a sector with minimal job opportunities. Despite working in the same environment, their experiences of SEAH may be vastly different due to the intersecting power dynamics of race, ability, and gender. For the disabled woman of colour, she experiences multiple intersections of marginalization. Because of this, She may encounter barriers such as inaccessible workspaces, lack of accommodations for her disability, and racial discrimination that compound her vulnerability to SEAH. These obstacles restrict her employment choices and heighten the difficulty in reporting SEAH and accessing support services, often driven by the fear of jeopardizing her job. Moreover, societal stereotypes and prejudices about disability and race may make it difficult for her concerns to be taken seriously or addressed effectively. In contrast, the non-disabled white woman may not face the same systemic barriers and prejudices. She may have greater access to resources, social networks, and institutional support structures that enable her to navigate and mitigate the risks of SEAH more effectively. Additionally, societal norms and perceptions of whiteness and being non-disabled may afford her greater credibility and privilege when seeking recourse for SEAH.

This example demonstrates how the Intersection analogy can illuminate the complex layers of discrimination individuals face, particularly highlighting the multifaceted nature of lived experiences. By considering the interplay of various identity factors, such as race, gender, ability, and socio-economic status, this approach encourages recognizing different ways people are particularly affected by multiple overlapping forms of discrimination. Applying an intersectional framework can effectively identify and help mitigate the unique vulnerabilities and barriers that marginalized communities experience.

However, simply acknowledging these differences is not sufficient. Proactive measures must be taken to create context-specific, locally-led, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred approaches to PSEAH that improve access to support and resources. The Intersection analogy emphasizes the need for systemic change in addressing discrimination and exploitation. Addressing SEAH is not merely about individual actions but about transforming organizational structures, societal norms, and institutional policies to be more inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of those at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalization.

Advance your learning journey

See Appendix 1 **Interactive Exercises for Exploring Power and Privilege. These exercises can be explored individually or in a group. See exercises on Reflexivity and intersectionality (1.1) and Identifying Forms of Oppression and Privilege in SEAH Case Studies (1.2).**

While the *intersection analogy* is crucial for recognizing intersecting forms of oppression, it offers limited insight into power dynamics. Thus, turning to the basement analogy becomes essential for a deeper understanding of the power dynamics that lead to SEAH.

The *Basement analogy* elaborates on the concepts introduced in the *Intersection analogy*, providing additional insight into how oppressive systems intersect with hierarchical and vertical power structures.

The basement analogy

"Imagine a basement which contains all people who are disadvantaged on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual preference, age and/or physical ability. These people are stacked - feet standing on shoulders-with those on the bottom being disadvantaged by the full array of factors, up to the very top, where the heads of all those disadvantaged by a singular factor brush up against the ceiling. Their ceiling is actually the floor above which only those who are not disadvantaged in any way reside. In efforts to correct some aspects of domination, those above the ceiling admit from the basement only those who can say that 'but for' the ceiling, they too would be in the upper room. A hatch is developed through which those placed immediately below can crawl. Yet this hatch is generally available only to those who (due to the singularity of their burden and their otherwise privileged position relative to those below) are in the position to crawl through. Those who are multiply-burdened are generally left below unless they can somehow pull themselves into the groups that are permitted to squeeze through the hatch."

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW[8]

Through colonial legacies of power, Global North actors are positioned either above the ceiling or within reach of the hatch due to their privilege. This privilege stems from various factors such as economic resources, physical appearance, colonialism, institutional authority, and societal norms. Privilege grants more significant influence and control in interactions with the communities we engage with, potentially resulting in unequal power dynamics and increased risks for SEAH. These communities cannot simply attribute their vulnerability to a single factor. Therefore, approaching SEAH as solely a gender issue risks overlooking the most vulnerable populations. To discover those at the bottom of the basement, who are often invisible in PSEAH initiatives, organizations must center local voices and experiences, trust communities will understand their needs more than a third party, and actively work to dismantle systems of power and privilege that perpetuate violence.

PSEAH interventions should not only be responsive to the specific contexts of programs but also grounded in context-specific, locally-led, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred practices that assess multiple forms of vertical power relations. For instance, consider a refugee camp setting. Addressing SEAH in this context requires a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between cultural norms, power dynamics, and the experiences of survivors. It is crucial to acknowledge that each refugee community comes from a diverse cultural background with specific traditions, norms, and practices. These cultural norms *may* shape perceptions of gender roles, sexuality, and interpersonal relationships, influencing survivors' willingness to disclose incidents of SEAH and seek support. In some cultures, including in Western societies, there may be a stigma surrounding discussions of sexual violence, leading survivors to fear ostracization, employment and service penalties, or blame if they come forward. Further, these conditions may dictate how survivors are expected to cope with trauma, potentially hindering their access to mental health services or

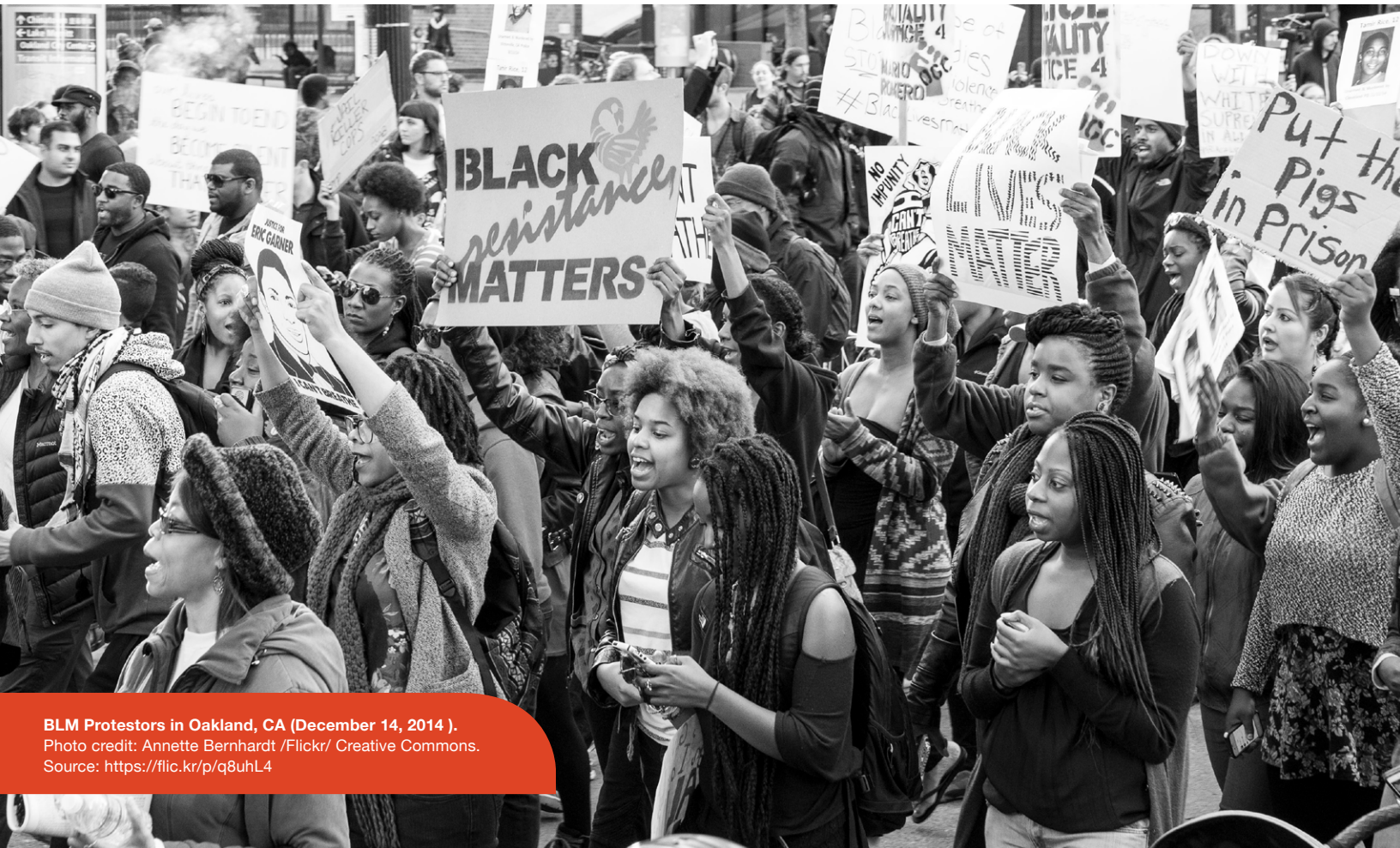
8. Crenshaw, K. (1989). "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8, pp. 151-152.

other forms of support. Power dynamics within refugee communities can also impact survivors' access to justice and support mechanisms. In these contexts, women and children may face greater vulnerability to exploitation and abuse, while patriarchal structures may disempower them from challenging instances of violence perpetrated by relatives, aid workers or community leaders. Moreover, power imbalances between refugee communities and humanitarian agencies can impact survivors' access to vital services and limit their involvement in decision-making, particularly when the perpetrator holds authority and influence over vital resources.

Considering the *Basement analogy*, effective approaches must go beyond identifying the prevalence of sexual violence and categorizing certain groups as "vulnerable." They must consider the circumstances that shape survivors' experiences and access to support. This may involve engaging community leaders and elders in understanding and challenging harmful norms, providing culturally sensitive psychosocial support services, and facilitating survivor-centred approaches to justice that prioritize the voices and agency of survivors. By addressing the intersecting influences of culture and power, interventions can better meet the diverse needs of survivors to promote healing, resilience, and empowerment.

Advance your learning journey

See Appendix 1 **Interactive Exercises for Exploring Power and Privilege. These exercises can be explored individually or in a group. See exercise on Empathetic Storytelling for Greater PSEAH Understanding (1.3).**



BLM Protestors in Oakland, CA (December 14, 2014).
Photo credit: Annette Bernhardt /Flickr/ Creative Commons.
Source: https://flic.kr/p/q8uhL4

Intersectionality in Organizational Structures and Programs: What are the issues?

A challenge to implementing intersectionality into PSEAH approaches is that **despite frequently using feminist and anti-racist terminology, such as "intersectionality," organizational understanding and commitment are lacking, impeding the accountability necessary to dismantle oppressive structures and practices.**

What implications does this hold? How might we, as a sector, address this discrepancy? While not exhaustive, the following paragraphs provide an overview of key challenges organizations face in adopting intersectional approaches generally and in the context of PSEAH. These detailed issues serve as a launch point to provoke discussion and introspection. For each issue, the resource includes an overview of the challenge or context, how it applies to PSEAH, and suggested questions for reflection and/or group discussion.

Issue: Tokenistic approaches to inclusion and partnerships

When organizations bring in individuals from marginalized groups (Black, Indigenous, People of Color, people with disabilities, and international local actors) to drive transformation, there is often an expectation that these individuals will deconstruct systemic issues related to oppression and create innovative approaches to issues like SEAH. However, the consequence of integrating diverse voices into oppressive organizational structures results in the mere appearance of successful diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, while failing to dismantle the underlying structures and practices that perpetuate harm within organizational teams. This can place an unfair burden on marginalized groups, as they are expected to educate others on these issues while simultaneously experiencing scrutiny, resistance, and silencing of their experiences.

In the context of SEAH, this burden can be particularly harmful. Marginalized individuals may face additional barriers in reporting incidents or advocating for change within organizations due to power dynamics, discrimination, or fear of retaliation. Therefore, to effectively address SEAH within organizations, organizations can create spaces of wellness, trust and support for all staff and local participants, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. This effort includes recognizing and valuing their diverse forms of labour, knowledge, and needs and actively working to dismantle oppressive structures and practices. By implementing trauma-informed and culturally sensitive wellness supports, organizations can better support marginalized individuals in their PSEAH efforts.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- In what ways have you observed tokenistic approaches to inclusion in organizational and partnership approaches? What made them feel tokenistic? What would a more authentic approach have looked like?
- How does your organization engage with individuals from marginalized communities, particularly those in the Global South? Are they employed in full-time or part-time positions, short-term consultancy roles, volunteer opportunities, or unpaid positions?
- How does your organization prioritize trust and wellness in PSEAH efforts with:
  – Staff;
  – Partners;
  – Local participants; and/or
  – Volunteers.

- How do inclusion and trust-based efforts vary across these groups? What approaches can your organization use to ensure that marginalized individuals are included in discussions about SEAH and empowered to lead and effect change?
- What steps can your organization take to recognize and value the diverse forms of labour, knowledge, and needs of marginalized individuals?

Issue: Buzzwords and language

Language and framing have significant implications for PSEAH efforts, especially when identifying gaps in sectoral approaches. When issues related to SEAH are framed in ways that only portray marginalized individuals, such as women in refugee camps, as passive victims of violence, it overlooks their agency and resilience in constructing sustainable solutions and approaches to PSEAH.

Moreover, when organizations fail to prioritize local knowledge and instead rely on buzzwords without a genuine commitment to the concepts underlying principles, it can hinder transformative change in addressing SEAH. For example, using terms like feminism, intersectionality, anti-racism, and power without dedicating time to constructing an organizational understanding and operationalizing their principles can result in superficial approaches that fail to address the root causes of SEAH. By addressing these barriers, a more holistic approach can emerge, fostering meaningful change and supporting survivors of SEAH.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- What language does your organization use to define its values related to feminism, anti-racism, equity and PSEAH? Where is this language used (e.g., in policies, guidance notes, public communications, etc.), and is it easily accessible?
- What efforts have been made to ensure a shared understanding of these principles within your organization and with partners? What additional steps can be made?
- What barriers exist to operationalizing principles such as feminism, intersectionality, anti-racism, and PSEAH within organizational structures, and how can these barriers be addressed?
- How does my organization talk about SEAH? In what ways does the language reinforce negative depictions of survivors (e.g., passive victimhood narratives), and in what ways does it support narratives of agency and resilience? What could be changed?
  - How may the language and framing in this discussion influence perceptions and future responses to SEAH, particularly in terms of recognizing the agency and resilience of marginalized individuals?

Issue: Prioritization of Western knowledge systems and overreliance on quantitative data and methodologies

A prevalent trend in the international cooperation sector is prioritizing Western knowledge systems over non-Western voices that offer alternative methodologies and approaches. Policies and programs are often developed in a silo instead of co-created with local communities. The superiority placed on Western knowledge and methodologies inhibits nuanced analysis of power systems and perpetuates white supremacist and saviour narratives that silence SEAH allegations.

Another challenge to PSEAH is the overreliance on quantitative data and methodologies, exacerbated by insufficient funding. The absence of dedicated funding for PSEAH efforts makes it exceedingly challenging to train personnel and implement and monitor PSEAH initiatives within programs and organizational structures. Many funders and grant guidelines prioritize quantifiable and trackable objectives and outcomes. However, quantifying the number or percentage of individuals safeguarded from SEAH is impractical. By collaborating with donors and other sector leaders, there is a need to advocate for innovative program evaluation strategies and explore incorporating decolonial methods such as local storytelling, oral histories, and sharing circles to collect data. These methods can offer invaluable insights into effectively addressing PSEAH initiatives.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Which knowledge systems can be identified in your organization's policy and program development approach? In what ways have local / non-Western knowledge systems informed your organization's approach?
- How does your organization monitor PSEAH efforts? How are partners and local participants informing data collection methods, and where could improvements be made?
- How does the focus on quantifiable outcomes by funders and grantees impact your organization's efforts toward PSEAH initiatives?
- What practical and immediate actions can your organization take to prioritize alternative monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning methods? Who within your organization or program participants can provide valuable insights to inform and shape these steps?

Issue: Lack of leadership in PSEAH

The emergence of the #AidToo movement, influenced by the momentum of the #MeToo movement, plays a crucial role in highlighting the widespread issue of SEAH in international cooperation. This movement reveals that SEAH is more than just an occasional problem between Western aid workers and individuals from the Global South. It is, in fact, a systemic issue deeply ingrained in the structures and practices of organizations, impacting marginalized communities across both the Global North and South. As a result, SEAH is a pervasive problem that permeates all levels of our organizations.

As previously stated, there is a noticeable absence of dedicated funding for PSEAH, which significantly hinders the development and implementation of effective and intersectional approaches. Without dedicated commitments from donors and decision-makers within organizations, PSEAH risks being treated as a peripheral concern rather than an integral aspect of organizational resilience and ethical practice. When PSEAH efforts are underfunded, they often become ad hoc. This fragmented approach fails to acknowledge PSEAH as a continuous and essential aspect of development work. In this way, organizations may perceive PSEAH as a one-off policy or resource, leading to inconsistent and often ineffective prevention strategies.

It is imperative for increased leadership to integrate PSEAH into the very fabric of organizational operations. PSEAH must be viewed not as an add-on consideration but as a core element of an organization's ethos and operations, being part of, and as important as, financial policies, risk management, policy development, and other vital components that ensure an organization's integrity and sustainability.

Questions for reflection and discussion

- Do your current policies position PSEAH as an organization-wide priority? Where are there gaps? How can your organization better integrate PSEAH into all aspects of operations?
- What training(s) do staff currently receive on PSEAH? Does every staff member feel confident and knowledgeable about PSEAH enough to confidently navigate a SEAH situation?
- Does your organization and team see PSEAH as a priority? If not, what steps can be taken to increase organizational commitment to PSEAH?
- How does your organization allocate resources for PSEAH initiatives? To secure dedicated funding for PSEAH, what steps might your organization take to ensure a sustainable and effective approach?
- How does your team currently assess the effectiveness of PSEAH strategies? What mechanisms can be implemented to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation of PSEAH initiatives?
- How transparent is your organization about SEAH within the organization? What systems does your organization have for reporting SEAH incidents, and how can they be made more effective and accessible?

Conclusion

While numerous resources are available for PSEAH, this guide fills a critical gap by providing practical, actionable learning tailored to understanding PSEAH through an intersectional lens. This resource both imparts theoretical knowledge and equips practitioners with the tools necessary for tangible application. As readers reflect on the insights gained from this resource, it is important to consider the next steps in their journey toward more effective PSEAH implementation. Next steps could involve exploring further intersectional approaches, engaging in collaborative discussions with peers, and applying the strategies and principles learned in their organizations. Continual learning and adaptation are vital in ensuring that PSEAH efforts are well-informed and dynamically responsive to the evolving challenges in the field.

The persistent and deep-rooted issue of SEAH in international cooperation, entrenched in colonial structures with complex power disparities, calls for a departure from conventional, one-dimensional approaches towards more inclusive and context-specific strategies. Therefore, this guide calls for organizations to integrate the theoretical understandings of intersectionality and use these anti-racist and feminist frameworks as a pivotal instrument for dismantling and transforming power structures that inform organizational practices and programs. This process should transcend superficial, tokenistic inclusion and actively prioritize marginalized voices, especially those from the communities organizations work with directly. This inclusion means prioritizing local communities in decision-making roles and acknowledging their experiential understanding of the distinct challenges they encounter. By adopting a context-specific, locally-led, trauma-informed, and survivor-centred approach, organizations can more effectively address the root causes of SEAH, ensuring their efforts' efficacy and long-term sustainability.

Appendix 1:

Interactive exercises for exploring power and privilege

These exercises aim to actively engage with and further explore the concepts presented in this resource. Designed to deepen understanding of intersectionality and reflexivity, these exercises encourage a thoughtful and critical examination of the various dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression, especially as they relate to SEAH scenarios. Throughout this resource, you will find sections specifically marked as "Facilitation notes." These notes provide additional insights, tips, and guidance for those leading group sessions or workshops. While these notes are tailored for facilitators, if you are embarking on this learning journey independently, feel free to focus primarily on the main text of the exercises, referring to the facilitator notes at your discretion.

Appendix 1.1: Reflexivity, positionality, and intersectionality

Engaging in intersectional analyses requires practicing reflexivity and positionality. Reflexivity is the critical examination of one's own power dynamics, biases, beliefs, and cultural influences to understand and mitigate their effects on knowledge production or organizational conduct. Positionality is recognizing and being transparent about one's own social, cultural, political, or economic position in relation to others. In exploring what development practitioners can learn from Black Feminists in the Global North, Kagal and Latchford[9] present a series of questions, listed below, that can guide a self-reflection on privilege and positionality. While it may be uncomfortable, these questions are critical to addressing power dynamics in the sector. An intersectional approach demands honest conversations about power dynamics, positioning ourselves within social hierarchies, and the urgent need to dismantle oppressive structures. For this exercise, start by answering the questions above in the space provided below.

Questions	Responses
Why am I here?	
Why am I doing this work?	
How do I think about my own work within my organization?	

9. Kagal, N., & Latchford, L. (2020). Towards an intersectional praxis in international development: what can the sector learn from Black feminists located in the global North?. Gender & Development, 28(1), 11-30.

How do I position myself within it relative to those I work with both inside and outside my organization?	
What if my connection was based on solidarity rather than sympathy?	
Can I position myself as an ally, rather than a rescuer or fixer?	
What does that mean in terms of acknowledging and giving up power and privilege?	
What truths/beliefs/biases do I hold about the populations I am working with and how does this influence my work?	
How do I act in solidarity without necessarily having to [physically] be there?	
Am I willing to acknowledge (and give up) the vast amount of resources spent on traveling to different countries, living as an ‘expat,’ being paid alarmingly high per-diems, etc…, under the guise of ‘development?’	
If so, can these resources be diverted to the populations I am working with to use in ways that they know best?	

The second segment of this exercise delves into the intricacies of positionality, prompting participants to reflect deeply on their roles within existing power hierarchies. Utilizing the 'wheel of privilege,' this part facilitates a comprehensive exploration for individuals and groups.

1.

Using the Wheel of Privilege, consider your positionality or examine your team's positionalities collectively if working in a group. Choose a specific program within your organization and map the positionalities of its participants. It is important to approach this exercise with an understanding that answering on behalf of others carries risks of assumption and requires a thoughtful and careful approach.

2.

Map positionalities using different coloured pens to represent each person or group you are examining. Circle the characteristics on the 'Wheel of Privilege' that correspond to each person's positionality. This visual technique highlights how various privileges intersect and prompts consideration of their manifestation within the workplace. Further, this will help you understand how your positionality aligns with and impacts those you work with.

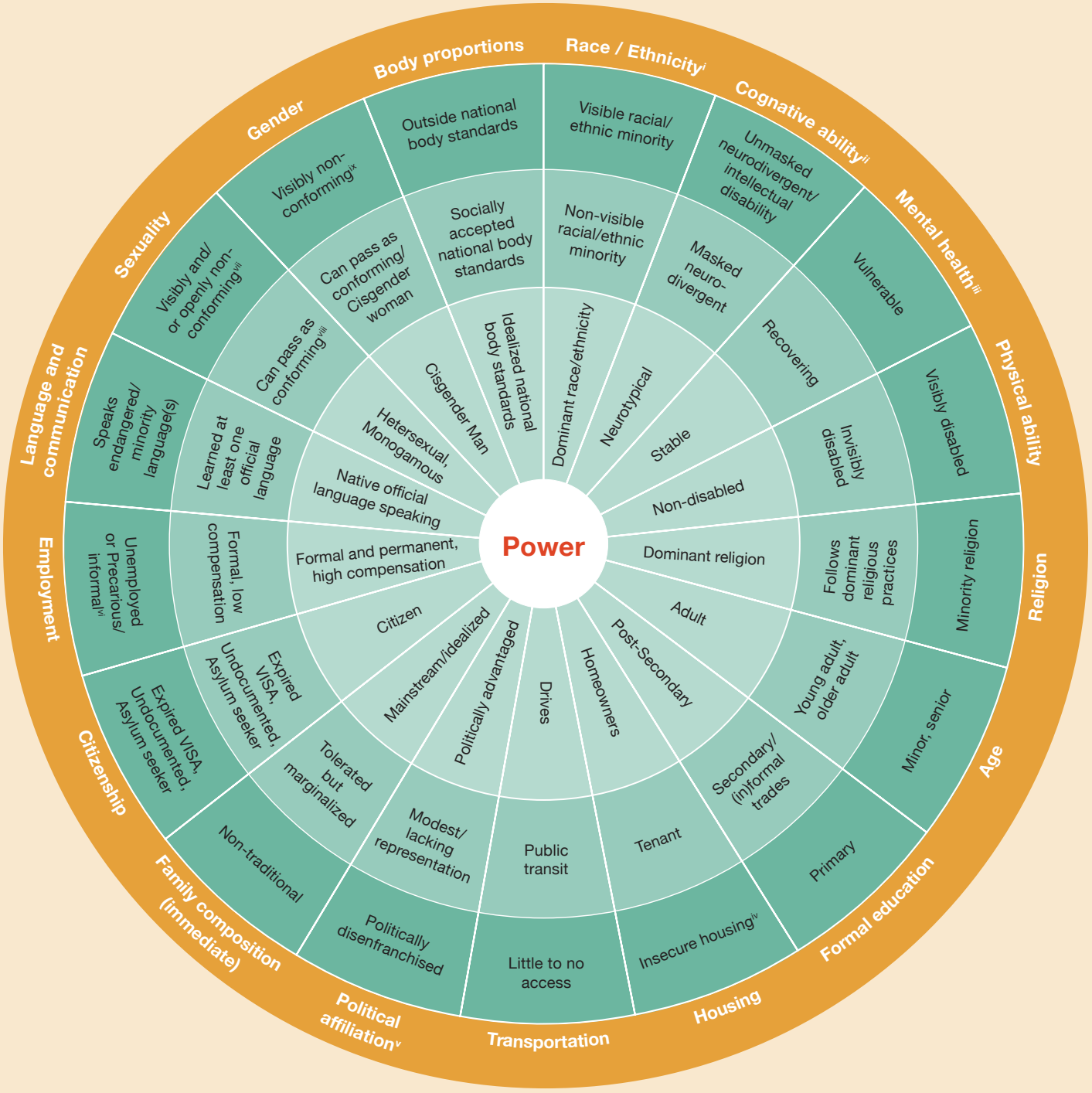
3.

Reflect on the outcomes from this mapping and discuss the following questions:

- What surprised you when you mapped out your own privilege and that of others?
- Where do you see potential power imbalances emerging, personally or within the group?
- Has your or the group's collective privilege changed over time?
- In what ways might your privileges blind you to certain risks or realities related to SEAH in the field?
- What steps can be taken to mitigate the impact of these privileges and imbalances in your work?
- How does your position on the wheel of privilege impact your personal and organizational understanding and approach to PSEAH issues?
- How can you use your positionality to advocate for and support those more vulnerable to SEAH?

Intersectionality wheel of privilege

Notes overleaf



Wheel of intersectionality notes

i. Race and ethnicity are distinct concepts, but they are frequently grouped together because both are used to categorize people, often leading to discrimination and social inequality. Race typically refers to groups based on physical characteristics such as skin color, hair type, or facial features. It's a social construct without a strong biological basis, created to categorize people into distinct groups. Ethnicity is related to shared cultural characteristics like language, religion, traditions, or nationality. It encompasses a broader range of identities and can include people of various racial backgrounds.

ii. Cognitive and physical disabilities can arise not only from birth but also from various exogenous shocks throughout an individual's life, potentially causing temporary or permanent limitations in their abilities.

iii. This doesn't mean that a person's mental health is fixed. Various factors can lead to a mental health challenge, even in those who have previously been considered stable.

iv. This can encompass a range of precarious living arrangements, including NGO-operated shelters, temporary public affordable housing, tent neighborhoods or even tent towns for refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as "ghettos," shanty towns, favelas, and other informal settlements.

v. Politically disenfranchised can mean both formal exclusion and a lack of accessibility to political institutions. This acknowledges the varying ways in which individuals or groups might be prevented from engaging in political processes.

vi. Examples: Chronicly unemployed, informal sector, slave labour, sex work, and indentured servitude.

vii. Examples: Lesbian, gay, queer, pan, bi, asexual.

viii. Examples: pan, bi, or asexual in hetero-passing relationship.

ix. Examples: Trans, intersex, and non-binary.

Appendix 1.2: Identifying forms of oppression and privilege in SEAH case studies

This case study exercise aims to deepen understanding of how intersecting forms of discrimination and vulnerability contribute to SEAH in organizational structures and programs. You will analyze a fictional case study, identify intersecting forms of oppression, and brainstorm strategies for addressing them. This exercise is intended to initiate discussions on how to transform programs to identify and address gaps that lead to SEAH, drawing on the key guidance/ takeaways outlined below for applying intersectionality to PSEAH.

This exercise has been constructed for facilitated group training and discussion; however, individual learners can also work through it at their own pace.

Key guidance for applying intersectionality to PSEAH

- Recognizing intersecting forms of discrimination and vulnerability is essential for understanding the complexities of SEAH.
- Addressing root causes and barriers to reporting and accountability requires holistic and intersectional approaches that consider affected individuals' intersecting identities and forms of discrimination.
- Building inclusive and accountable programs requires ongoing reflection, learning, and adaptation to ensure that interventions are effective and responsive to the needs of diverse populations.

Facilitation notes

- Divide the participants into breakout groups and prompt them to discuss the provided scenarios and questions below. The aim is to uncover the influence of intersecting forms of oppression within each scenario.
- Following their discussions, encourage participants to leverage their collective knowledge and personal experiences to pinpoint and contemplate how the specific contexts of their programs would alter the given scenarios.
- Once these context-specific nuances are highlighted, participants will be prompted to reevaluate how their organizational practices could bolster accountability within the scenarios or potentially exacerbate existing gaps.
- Recall that these discussions can be triggering for participants. Remind participants of available resources and establish community agreements and guidelines as appropriate.

For guidance to answers, consult appendix 2.

Example 1

In a small Iraqi village, a Canadian non-governmental organization (NGO) is implementing a water sanitation project as a way to address the considerable amount of poverty in the village. The team implementing the project has both Canadian and local staff. Amina is from a low-income background and is a marginalized ethnic minority. She is one of the local staff members on the team.

John is a senior aid worker on the project and holds significant power in project decision-making. He begins to show undue attention to Amina and offers her opportunities for a job promotion in exchange for sexual favours. Amina feels trapped and has limited options. Refusing John could mean losing her job, which is vital for her family's survival, and accepting his advances goes against her morals. Additionally, she fears reporting John's behaviour will not lead to any action.

Questions

- What intersectional modes of oppression contribute to Amina's vulnerability in this situation?
- How do the power dynamics between Amina and John influence her ability to make decisions?
- What barriers to reporting might Amina face?
- How can the organization's policies better protect staff like Amina from exploitation?
- What support systems should be in place for individuals in Amina's position?

Responses

Example 2

In a Southern town in Mexico, there is an international education program pairing local high school students with aid workers for a 2-month program. 16-year-old Carlos, who lives in a poverty-stricken neighbourhood, is one of the students selected for the program. Carlos, an intelligent and driven boy, is secretly gay in a community where homosexuality is stigmatized. The education program is run by several foreign volunteers, including Mark, a man in his mid-thirties.

Mark starts to take a particular interest in Carlos, initially offering extra after-school mentoring and support for his education after secondary school. During one of these sessions, Carlos discloses to Mark that he is gay. After this, the relationship quickly turns inappropriate. Mark begins to exploit Carlos's vulnerability and his fear of his community finding out his sexuality. He manipulates Carlos into a sexual relationship, falsely promising him a scholarship for further education abroad.

Questions

- What intersectional modes of oppression contribute to Carlos' vulnerability in this situation?
- What are the implications of the promise of a scholarship on Carlos's decision-making?
- What measures could be implemented to prevent similar situations?
- How can the program support Carlos after recognizing the abuse?

Responses

Example 3

In a small town in Zambia, an international NGO is conducting a project aimed at helping people with disabilities realize their rights and access support. The project focuses on providing the local community with medical assistance and health resource education. David, a 35-year-old man with muscular dystrophy, has limited mobility and is confined to a wheelchair.

David lives in a remote part of town with limited essential healthcare services. He is dependent on the NGO's outreach program for his medical needs. Emily, a white healthcare worker from the NGO, visits David twice a week for check-ups and to deliver his medication. Over time, Emily begins taking advantage of David's dependency and isolation. She initiates sexual acts on David without his consent, exploiting her position to exchange these acts for medical supplies, aware that David's options are constrained. David fears he might lose his healthcare support if she is removed from the position.

Questions

- How does David's disability and geographical isolation contribute to his vulnerability?
- What widespread societal beliefs about people with disabilities can invisibilize the abuse David is experiencing?
- What factors might deter David from reporting Emily's exploitation?
- What safeguards could be in place to protect beneficiaries like David?

Responses

Appendix 1.3: Empathetic storytelling for greater PSEAH understanding

This exercise is an engaging and creative way to deepen participants' understanding of how intersectional modes of oppression and power shape experiences of SEAH. Through personal anecdotes, empathetic listening, and artistic expression, participants will explore the complexities of PSEAH strategies, fostering empathy, reflection, and reciprocal dialogue.

Steps

- Co-create community guidelines to ensure the respect and establish trust of all participants.
- Invite Global North and Global South participants to share personal experiences or stories from the field that illustrate the complexities of SEAH in the field and within organizations.
- Encourage participants to use creative mediums such as writing, drawing, or dance to bring their stories to life.
- Facilitate a storytelling or sharing circle where participants can share their narratives and engage in empathetic listening and reflection.
- After the storytelling session, lead a debriefing session to discuss common themes, insights gained, and implications for PSEAH programming and advocacy within context-specific programs and scenarios.

Facilitation notes

- **Importance of involving local actors:** Involving local actors, whether virtually or in the field, is essential for ensuring the relevancy, cultural sensitivity, and sustainability of efforts to address SEAH. Local actors bring firsthand knowledge of community dynamics, cultural norms, and contextual challenges, enriching discussions and informing effective interventions.
- **Compensation for local knowledge:** Extractive knowledge collection without fair compensation is violent and colonial. If your organization invites local leaders and knowledge keepers, they must be compensated for their expertise and provided with necessary local and community support networks after the exercise.
- **Benefits of a local facilitator:** A local facilitator can serve as a bridge between Global North staff, Global South Staff, and local communities, facilitating cross-cultural understanding and communication. They can provide valuable insights into community perspectives, priorities, and sensitivities, ensuring that discussions and activities are respectful, inclusive, and productive in addressing SEAH. Further, a local facilitator can help establish trust within the group, creating a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their stories and perspectives.
- **Establishing community guidelines:** To ensure a safe and inclusive environment for storytelling and sharing, it is important to develop community guidelines that promote respect, empathy, and confidentiality. These guidelines may include:
  - Respectful listening: Listen actively and attentively to others without interrupting or judging.
  - Confidentiality: Respect the privacy and confidentiality of participants' stories and reflections.
  - Safe space: Create a safe and non-threatening space where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives.
  - Cultural sensitivity: Be mindful of cultural differences and sensitivities, ensuring that discussions and activities are inclusive and respectful of diverse backgrounds and identities.

Note for self-guided learners

The process requires introspection and self-guided exploration for individuals looking to engage in this exercise. Journaling allows one to reflect on personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings related to SEAH, intersectionality, and power dynamics.

- Instead of group sharing, write down personal experiences or observations related to SEAH. This can include direct experiences, witnessed events, or reflections on stories heard from others, considering both Global North and Global South perspectives.
- Use creative forms such as writing, drawing, or symbolic representation to deepen the exploration of these narratives. This could involve writing a poem, drawing a scene, or any other form that helps express and understand the stories' complexities.
- Re-read or examine your entries, practicing empathetic listening to your own voice. Reflect on your emotions, reactions, and thoughts about the narratives.
- After reflection, write a debriefing note to yourself. Identify common themes and insights and explain how these might affect your understanding and actions related to SEAH.
  - Identify any biases or assumptions that arise. Acknowledge them and explore their roots.
  - Note any questions or uncertainties that emerged during your reflection. Use these to identify areas for further learning or exploration.
  - Acknowledge the limitations of a single perspective. Seek out additional stories, literature, or voices, especially from underrepresented communities, to broaden your understanding.

Appendix 2: Identifying forms of oppression and privilege in SEAH case studies answer key

Case study 1

1. Gender, ethnicity, economic status, minority status on the team
2. Power imbalance created by John's power over project decisions and Amina's economic dependence on her job
3. Barriers include fear of retaliation, lack of trust in reporting processes, and John's position of power.
4. Clear, enforceable policies, safe and locally embedded reporting mechanisms, and widespread awareness programs on PSEAH, power, and consent.

Case study 2

1. Carlos' age, economic status, sexual orientation, and community stigma and beliefs.
2. The promise manipulates Carlos by exploiting his aspirations and future goals.
3. Same as case study 1.4
4. Locally-embedded psychological support; connect and support the pursuit of justice.

Case study 3

1. David's physical disability and remote living situation make him reliant on NGO support for healthcare. Emily is the only NGO worker he is in contact with.
2. Invisibility and devaluation of people with disabilities, perceived asexuality, and the severity of claims dismissed by stereotyping people with disabilities as perpetual victims, lacking agency, and continually dependent.
3. Reduced proximity to reporting mechanisms, fear of losing healthcare support, limited mobility, the stigma surrounding people with disabilities and SEA.
4. Regular monitoring of field staff and participants, alternating field staff in areas of service.

Appendix 3: Intersectionality reading list

Ahmed, S. (2009). Embodying Diversity: Problems and Paradoxes for Black Feminists. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 12(1), 41-52. Available at: https://www.brunel.ac.uk/research/Documents/Ahmed-S-2009-Embodying-Diversity-Nov-21-paper.pdf

In this article, Sara Ahmed explores the complexities and challenges faced by Black women and Black feminists in navigating the discourse of diversity within academic and institutional settings. She examines how diversity initiatives often tokenize or marginalize Black feminists, reinforcing existing power structures rather than addressing systemic inequalities. This article is essential for international development organizations to better understand how race and gender intersect, particularly in contexts where Black women are brought into organizations to enhance diversity. Sara Ahmed's analysis of violence in institutional structure reveals limitations to expanding anti-racist and feminist initiatives without structural change.

Carastathis, A. (2013). Basements and intersections. *Hypatia*, 28(4), 698-715. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24542081

In this article, Anna Carastathis revisits Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal argument in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) to reclaim a metaphor often overlooked in the mainstreaming of intersectionality within feminist theory dominated by white perspectives. Alongside the well-known intersection metaphor, Carasthathis draws on Crenshaw's basement metaphor to illustrate how conventional approaches, which prioritize singular, mutually exclusive, and analogically constructed categories like "race" and "sex" linked to masculinity and whiteness, perpetuate social hierarchy rather than rectify it. Carastathis argues that by neglecting the basement metaphor, interpretations of intersectionality divorced from its roots in Black feminist thought risk diluting Crenshaw's analysis of socio-legal hierarchy reproduction. This article underscores the critical significance of recognizing why prevailing interpretations of intersectionality within the sector tend to emphasize intersecting identities over vertical power differentials, which can diminish the transformative potential of intersectionality within the sector's endeavours.

Combahee Rivers Collective. (1979). A Black Feminist Statement. Off Our Backs, 9(6), 6–8. Available at: https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/

Combahee River Collective's "A Black Feminist Statement" (1979) is a seminal document in Black feminist thought, articulating an intersectional analysis of oppression and emphasizing the importance of collective struggle for liberation. It challenges mainstream feminism's focus on white, middle-class women and remains a foundational text for understanding the interconnected nature of race, gender, and class in systems of oppression. This article is crucial for delving into the historical roots of intersectional analysis, offering insights that extend beyond Crenshaw's seminal work. By challenging conventional notions of solidarity, it illuminates the origins of intersectionality's praxis, providing the sector with valuable context and understanding when invoking an intersectional analysis to PSEAH.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989) “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

In this article, Kimberlé Crenshaw critiques anti-discrimination law and feminist and antiracist discourse and practice. She argues that the legal and political frameworks of the time failed to address the unique experiences of Black women due to their intersecting identities. She argues that by focusing solely on race or gender, these frameworks neglected the compounded discrimination faced by Black women. Crenshaw’s central argument advocates for an intersectional approach that acknowledges and addresses the interconnectedness of race and gender oppression in understanding discrimination against Black women. This article is essential reading and is recognized as the pioneering emergence of the concept of intersectionality.

Gillespie, E. M., Mirabella, R. M., & Eikenberry, A. M. (2020, January). # Metoo/# Aidtoo and creating an intersectional feminist NPO/NGO sector. In *Nonprofit Policy Forum* (Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 20190019). De Gruyter.

In this article, the authors explore the intersection of #MeToo and #AidToo movements in the nonprofit/NGO sector, focusing on creating an intersectional feminist approach. It discusses challenges, opportunities, and strategies for addressing sexual harassment and power dynamics, emphasizing the need for inclusive organizational cultures and centring marginalized voices.

Mason, C. L. (2019). ‘Buzzwords and fuzzwords: flattening intersectionality in Canadian aid.’ Canadian *Foreign Policy Journal*, 25(2), 203-219.

Cheryl L. Mason examines how intersectionality is simplified and diluted within Canadian aid discourse. Mason argues that while Canadian aid agencies often use the language of intersectionality, they fail to engage with its complexities and transformative potential. Instead, intersectionality becomes a buzzword or fuzzword, losing its critical edge and serving as a superficial addition to policy and practice. Mason highlights the need for a deeper understanding of intersectionality within Canadian aid, urging for more meaningful and inclusive approaches to addressing the intersecting inequalities in the sector. This article is essential for grasping the nuances of intersectionality, particularly within the context of Canadian aid. It sheds light on the specific challenges and contextual complexities surrounding the application of intersectionality in this field, offering valuable insights into its limitations and shortcomings.

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