



# WESNET

The Women's Services Network

## INTERSECTIONALITY & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### Policy position

- 'Intersectionality' recognises that certain individuals face multiple and intersecting forms of structural oppression resulting in discrimination and disadvantage.
- An intersectional approach acknowledges systemic discrimination due to sexual orientation and identity, gender and gender identity, race, economic status, immigration status, national origin, and ability, among other aspects of one's identity, and that these forms of systemic discrimination intersect with each other and present unique challenges for affected individuals and communities.
- While gender inequality is the underlying condition for violence against women, it is not always the only or the most prominent factor. The gendered drivers of violence are often experienced in combination with other forms of inequality and discrimination leading to different rates of violence and different types of violence experienced among women (Our Watch, 2020).
- An intersectional approach to violence against women includes a consideration of where gender intersects with other inequalities/oppressions to produce unique experiences of violence. By understanding the different ways in which violence is perpetrated and experienced, an intersectional approach can help to design and develop appropriate context-specific responses to violence against women (Imkaan, 2019).
- Intersectional approaches to violence against women recognise that all oppressions exist simultaneously, and that categories of oppression mutually construct each other to create unique experiences of violence for women and girls.
- Research (Thiara & Roy, 2010) has shown that organisations which work most efficiently and effectively in addressing the intersectionality needs of marginalised women facing violence are 'led by and for' organisations: organisations that are independent, specialist and dedicated services run 'by and for' the communities they seek to serve.
- Specialist services may be delivered by a range of equality-led organisations including organisations working with First Nations women, women with disabilities, LGBTIQ organisations and migrant and refugee women's organisations.

### An intersectional approach

The UN Women's Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence Against Women from 2012 recommends that national action plans should recognise that women's experience of

violence is shaped by factors such as their race, colour, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, marital status, sexual orientation, HIV/AIDS status, migrant or refugee status, age, or disability (UN Women, 2012).

The handbook further notes that prevention-based activities can involve promoting “not only respectful relationships and gender equality, but also challenge discrimination and stereotyping based on other identity characteristics.”

Intersectional approaches to violence against women recognise that all oppressions exist simultaneously, and that categories of oppression mutually construct each other to create unique experiences of violence for women and girls. For example, for a disabled First Nations woman living rurally on a low income, her experiences of sexism, ableism, racism, geographical disadvantage and poverty are compounded to produce a particular experience of violence and oppression.

Policy and practice which seeks to prevent and combat violence against women that is only willing to engage with, for example, her experience of domestic violence but not sexual violence, or ableism but not the ramifications of colonisation fail to comprehensively address violence as experienced by women and girls (Imkaan, 2019).

## What makes people ‘vulnerable’?

Article 12 in the Istanbul Convention specifically urges parties to “take into account and address the specific needs of persons made vulnerable by particular circumstances”. People made vulnerable by particular circumstances is defined as including pregnant women and women with young children, persons with disabilities, including those with mental or cognitive impairments, persons living in rural or remote areas, sex workers, persons of national or ethnic minority background, migrants (including undocumented migrants and refugees), gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and transgender persons as well as HIV-positive persons, homeless persons, drug dependants, children and the elderly.

The UN emphasises that the focus is not on “vulnerable groups”, but rather on circumstances that make people vulnerable, such as “social, economic and cultural processes and inequalities that are changing and shifting over time, so that indeed certain groups are ‘made’ vulnerable” (Hester and Lilley, 2014). Persons are made vulnerable by circumstances, but vulnerability is not an attribute of a person or a group.

## About WESNET

With almost 350 eligible members across Australia, WESNET represents a range of organisations and individuals including women’s refuges, shelters, safe houses and information/referral services.

Harnessing its large national network of members and associate members, WESNET plays an important role in identifying unmet needs, canvassing new and emerging issues, facilitating policy and sector debate and providing expert advice to government to provide improved responses to the problem of domestic and family violence. We do this within our

communities - including the Australian Women's Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) - and in partnership with non-government stakeholders.

## References and further reading

Hester, M. , & Lilley, S-J. (2014). [Domestic and Sexual Violence Perpetrator Programmes: Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention: A collection of papers on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.](#) Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Imkaan (2019). [The Value of Intersectionality in Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls.](#)

Our Watch (2018). [Organisational Strategy to Strengthen Our Intersectionality Approach 2018-20.](#)

Thiara, R.K. and Roy, S. (2010). Vital statistics: The experiences of BAMER women and children facing violence and abuse. London: Imkaan.

UN Women (2012). [Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence Against Women.](#)

Victorian Government (2021). [Intersectionality and family violence.](#)