



# Societas.Expert

## Faculty for **Social Wellbeing**

The Faculty for Social Wellbeing research magazine for academics, students, alumni, stakeholders and the general public In collaboration with Corporate ID Group.

EDITORIAL PANEL  
PROF. ANDREW AZZOPARDI  
DR PAULANN GRECH

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L-Università ta' Malta  
Faculty for Social Wellbeing



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# Editorial

**PROF. ANDREW AZZOPARDI**  
**DR PAULANN GRECH**

The complex nuances around intersectionality do deserve the focus that is being given in this edition of *societas.expert* supported by Corporate ID Group. For academia to remain relevant to the community, we need to ensure that we provide data and information that can help us respond to the changes happening in our community by drawing together the varied disciplines.

It is useless thinking about community as a static reality. We need to understand that our communities are organic and are positioned in a particular socio-economic context which needs to be watched, analyzed and policy developed around those emerging realities. We believe that this edition of *societas.expert* has managed to touch on some very important themes that deserve further conversation in the area of intersectionality.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank Mr Jesmond Saliba, a long-time friend, who leads Corporate ID Group for his support in this initiative.



# How are we to ensure that the ‘societal needs’ remain at the centre of our next lap of the journey?

**JESMOND SALIBA**  
CEO, Corporate Id Group

- What kind of society do we want to have?
- How do we define social justice in today’s world?
- How do we gauge it?
- Is it an issue of numbers?
- Can it be achieved?
- How do we determine the common good, when so many individuals are facing struggles?
- Where are we heading to?

Historians will be looking at the past three years as the ones which might have left a scar on a number of people, made the normal abnormal and raised significant questions on how society functions.

Covid-19 had its impact – this is a fact.



Many speak about the economic impact which we are obviously still experiencing. There was also an impact on health, which again we're still experiencing, though not at the same levels of the first waves of the pandemic which almost brought the world to a standstill. This standstill left an impact on the way of life of so many, and strained the essence of society and human interaction.

The world was drawn into a race against time to resolve the issue from the angle of health and address the economic impact on the different states and as a consequence on their citizens.

And the world didn't have time to heal and again we were faced with another crisis this time a war in Ukraine. It wasn't the first or last war as conflicts are happening everywhere, but this war hit Europe closely and it had a far-reaching impact on the livelihood of many. Apart from the atrocities that this war brought about, the challenges on the global economies compounded themselves on various levels and we can note that around the continent we have significant challenges which are putting a strain on people.

This situation is intersecting with the advancement of the notion of ESG in the corporate world. To date a lot of emphasis is being done on the environmental and the governance aspects. The social aspect is as important, and in a society like ours, we need to ensure that the 'societal' aspect is determined through a localised effort to understand the overall societal requirements. This can be done effectively if we apply ourselves to an intersectional thinking rather than putting issues in boxes. Our society is systemic and we cannot understand one reality by isolating it from the rest. This is what we are trying to do in this edition of *societas.expert* which is being written in conjunction with the Faculty for Social Wellbeing. The timeliness of this matter that is being dealt with in this edition is another important response of the faculty to these social nuances.

The challenge to strike a balance will always be there, and the key to this is through a social-innovative approach to ensuring social justice is based on the notions of the common good and the willingness to create a fair and just society.



# BIOS

**DR CHANTAL AVELLINO** has a first degree in Psychology and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Probation Services, both awarded by the University of Malta. Having developed an interest in the field of forensics, she went on to complete an MSc in Forensic Psychology at Glasgow Caledonian University. This led to reading for a Ph.D. in Psychology with the University of Portsmouth, under the supervision of Prof. Alan Costall, Dr Michelle Newberry and Dr Adrian Needs. Her research focuses on risk assessment and risk management of offenders, with a special interest in community-based sanctions. She is also a warranted Forensic Psychologist and a Lecturer at the University of Malta. Dr Avellino is also a member of the Victim Offender Mediation Committee (VOMC). Furthermore, she is also a member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) as well as a member of the Malta Chamber of Psychologists (MCP).

**AUDREY BEZZINA** has first graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Education, specialising in English in 1999. She taught at Marsa Primary School and consequently at Lija Primary School. She read for her Masters Degree in Education, specialising in Culturally Responsive Education between 2013 and 2016, at the University of Malta. She then read for a Post-Graduate Diploma in Assessment for Learning with the Institute for Education between 2016 and 2018. She is currently an Assistant Head at St Ignatius College, Qormi St Sebastian Primary School. She is reading for an M.Phil. with the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, specialising in children's political activism.

**PROF. MARVIN FORMOSA** is Associate Professor in Gerontology at the Department of Gerontology and Dementia Studies, University of Malta. He holds the posts of Chairperson of the National Commission for Active Ageing (Malta), Rector's Delegate for the University of the Third Age (Malta), and Director of the International Institute on Ageing United Nations - Malta. Prof. Formosa published widely in the field of ageing studies, and his most recent publications include *Ageing and COVID-19: Making sense of a disruptive world* (Łuszczynska & Formosa, 2021). He is Malta's Country Team Leader for the Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe (SHARE).

**AUDREY FRIGGIERI** is a Ph.D. researcher at the Faculty for Social Wellbeing, University of Malta. Her research focuses on the lived experiences of young people in Malta who are classified as NEET. Audrey is an educator by profession, with a Masters degree in Adult Education and postgraduate training in family psychotherapy. She has worked extensively in state secondary schools as teacher and as school leadership team member, as well as in the Adult Education sector. Audrey is an author, and has penned a number of works of fiction in Maltese, including popular stories for children. She is currently occupying the post of Commissioner on Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence.

**DR PAULANN GRECH** is a Senior Lecturer with the Department of Mental Health, University of Malta. She is involved in projects related to critical psychiatry, service user advocacy and community engagement. Dr Grech is the chairperson of the NGO Hearing Voices Malta and sits on the board of directors of the European Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Research in Continuing Professional Development. Dr Grech is a mental health activist - she regularly co-organises awareness events and participates in others as an invited speaker. As a writer, Dr Grech is interested in writing about life from a mental health perspective.

**DR MARIA PISANI** holds a Ph.D. in adult education, and an BA and an MA in Youth & Community Studies. She is an academic, youth and community worker and an activist. Maria is the co-founder of Integra Foundation, an NGO dedicated to providing support to asylum seekers and refugees. Maria's research interests include forced migration, with a focus on critical intersectionalities, including youth, 'race'/ethnicity, gender, age, legal status, disability and the nation state. Her academic work is unapologetically political and committed to social justice and transformation.

**DR ALEXEI SAMMUT** before joining the University of Malta's Department of Mental Health had a career as a Deputy Charge Nurse in the state Mental Health services. He read for his undergraduate degree with the University of Malta both in Nursing and in Mental Health and read for his Ph.D. in Mental Health Nursing with Kingston and St George's University of London. Dr Sammut has presented in several conferences. He is the co-ordinator of the B.Sc. Mental Health Nursing Part-Time course and is also actively involved in research and projects including the national mental health awareness campaign #STOPSTIGMA. He is the President of the Maltese Association of Psychiatric Nurses (MAPN).

**DR KEVIN SAMMUT HENWOOD** had graduated in Psychology with Honours at the University of Malta. He later read for a Masters in Forensic Psychology at the University of Surrey where he graduated with Distinction. He has also completed a Doctorate in Forensic Psychology at the Centre of Forensic and Family Psychology, Division of Psychiatry and Applied Psychology at the School of Medicine of University of Nottingham. He is a principal psychologist employed with the Correctional Services Agency, where he provides psychological assessment and treatment to offenders. Dr Sammut Henwood also acts as the clinical lead at CSA where he manages a team of psychosocial Professionals. He also has experience working with community based offenders and acts as an expert witness in Maltese law courts in matters of psychology. He is also a member of the Parole Board and also provides consultancy services to local NGOs such as RISE (Rehabilitation in Society). He is currently the Chair of the Malta Psychology Profession Board and until recently the Vice President of the Malta Chamber of Psychologists.

**DR MARTA SANT** is a Counselling Psychologist and Resident Academic within the Department of Psychology. She was previously employed as a Lecturer on the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at London Metropolitan University. Her research interests include the supervisory relationship in clinical supervision, psychodynamic practice, older adulthood and qualitative methodologies. She has presented empirical and practice-based papers at local and international conferences and compiled the University of Malta's 'Supporting suicidal and/or severely distressed students' staff guidelines. She runs a small private practice where she sees adult clients and currently serves on the Parole Board and on the Adoption Board.

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# Intersectionality

A brief personal and professional understanding

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## ABSTRACT

This reflexive paper discusses how the author, as an academic and practitioner psychologist, engages with intersectionality Professionally and personally. Intersectionality's location and origins in the field of African-American feminism are acknowledged. Controversies related to the concept are briefly addressed, together with criticisms that have been levelled at the theory. The ways in which multiple identities are positioned and the impact this positioning has on relationships, systems and power dynamics are considered. Furthermore, intersectionality's inclusion in the field of psychology is reviewed. Here, the author briefly outlines how she uses intersectionality to appreciate the impact that diverse social contexts and structures have on students and clients in therapy. Specific emphasis is placed on intersectionality within the teaching of psychology at tertiary level. The complex challenges experienced by students and academics alike in navigating areas of power and privilege, and the nuances inherent in these challenges are explored.

## KEYWORDS

Intersectionality, feminism, identities, psychology, power, privilege

Intersectionality is embedded in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory (Bilge, 2020; Carbado et al., 2013; Cole, 2020). Crenshaw (1989) first used the term when writing about the experiences of Black North American women, specifically the employment challenges they encountered and how they were disregarded on the grounds of both their gender and race in anti-discrimination laws and the political sphere (Yuval-Davies, 2006). It was argued that people are grouped within and across diverse social categories; this intersecting positioning in turn affects and determines the course of one's life in multiple ways (Yuval-Davies, 2006). Therefore, intersectionality serves to unravel what it means to be located across "multiple axes of difference", recognising that these are intertwined (Carbado, 2013, p. 812, Yep, 2016). For many, this involves experiencing what Cordova and Mendoza Knecht (2019) referred to as "overlapping oppressions" (p. 204). Since the late 1980s, academics and activists have expanded intersectionality to encompass concerns surrounding identity, discourse, institutions, organisations and politics. Intersectionality has been adopted and applied across a range of disciplines, illuminating the ways in which power is structured, how it operates and the ways in which it impacts people (Carbado et al., 2013).

More recently, Bilge (2020) expressed her concerns that intersectionality was currently overlooking and ignoring the specific group of people it originally attended to, that is, Black females, hence risking the "erasure" of Black feminists (p. 2319). This concern was shared by Cole (2020), who noted that, originally, the theory also addressed the empowerment of Black females. Others have further critiqued the "de-racialising" of intersectionality (Carbado et al., 2013, p. 309). I write this in order to give recognition to the theory's roots and origins, whilst introducing my own positioning as a White, Maltese, female. Furthermore, this paper discusses my Professional and personal understanding of a theory which originated in North America (Yuval-Davies, 2006); some have questioned the ways in which, if at all, the theory can be translated in other countries with all their diverse historical, social and political contexts (Carbado et al., 2013). The international expansion of the theory has generated inter-disciplinary discussion and controversy (Carbado et al., 2013). Intersectionality's far-reaching aims have potentially further contributed to debate and argument in its regard (Carbado, 2013).

Intersectionality has been described as "a fairly ubiquitous concept" (Grzanka et al., 2019, p. 493); presented as a theory, it is not a theory in the traditional sense. For example, one cannot 'prove' or 'disprove' the theory scientifically through the use of experiments (Grzanka et al., 2019). Others have debated whether it is in fact a theory, a "framework" or a stance towards social activism (Warner et al., 2016, p. 171). Intersectionality has also been mistakenly critiqued for solely focussing on identity, race and/or gender (Grzanka & Miles, 2016; Grzanka et al., 2019).

Intersectionality provides us with the opportunity to move beyond the idea of "examining identities as silos" (Chan et al., 2018, p. 66). The theory takes into account not only how identity/ies are grouped and structured, but also the ways in which some identity- based categories and social divisions become established, concrete and immutable (Yuval- Davies, 2006). Lee (2000) questioned if we are 'born' into specific identity/ies or 'made'/ 'positioned' within specific identities. This resonates with me based on my own personal experiences as the only child of a prominent public figure; this has shaped much of who I am because of the perceptions that others have of me due to my paternal background and how people relate to me as a result of this. Social categorisation and division may not correspond to how the categorised subject experiences the self; yet these are still powerful, even more so when they are based on exclusion (Yuval-Davies, 2006).

Yuval-Davies (2006) referred to "social divisions" which include, but are not limited to, class and gender. Social categories are connected and interwoven (p. 194). The risk of such categorisation is that it promotes the erroneous view that belonging to one category or social division implies sameness; within social categories and divisions

there will always be marginalisation, including in categories/divisions that are already characterised by oppression. Arguments pertaining to social categories and social divides are really discussions about human relationships, including formal or informal relationships, how people are depicted in the media, experiences of inclusion and exclusion, family systems, organisations and even the law (Yuval-Davies, 2006). Inequalities, too, are manifest in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, occurring in public and private spheres of lives and coloured by history, politics and culture (Verloo, 2006).

Intersectionality interrogates systemic issues related to oppression, inequality, discrimination and power (Cole, 2020); therefore, whilst intersectionality is strongly tied to identity, we cannot begin and stop at the self in isolation. Grzanka and Miles (2016) observed that intersectionality directs us in attending to “identities in relationship to the systems of power that engender them” (p. 384). Identity and power shape and influence one another and therein lies the importance of listening to how people recount and describe their identity/ies within the social contexts they inhabit (Cole, 2020). Furthermore, as Yep (2016) emphasised, some identities remain uninterrogated, yet held to be the norm against which other identities are compared and found lacking.

We are currently living in a world that is encountering the rise of populism and right-wing conservative ideologies (Bilge, 2020); Grant (2018) observed that the international landscape is moving towards “social deterioration” (p.41). Intersectionality recognises that national issues and concerns cannot be addressed without taking into account “social and historical power dynamics that transcend political boundaries” (Grzanka et al., 2019, p. 483).

However, the risk here is adopting what Bilge (2013) referred to as the “superficial deployment of intersectionality”, that is, using intersectionality without fully recognising complicated social issues and moving away from the theory’s commitment to social justice (p. 408). However, Carbado et al., (2013) asserted that “not all who deploy intersectionality perceive themselves to be part of a social movement” (p. 305). In my work as an academic and a practitioner psychologist, I employ intersectionality in myriad ways: to critically interrogate the discipline of psychology in my teaching of the subject and to recognise how the lives of my students and clients are affected by social factors that are often out of their control.

Psychology has taken longer to integrate the theory and practice of intersectionality, unlike other disciplines within the social sciences (Wallin-Ruschman et al., 2020). However, the theory has become mainstream within the discipline, which has “flattened the term” by largely attending to individualised intersecting identities, overlooking the wider social contexts that impact individuals (Warner et al., 2016, p. 173). Here I am adopting a position of “critical reflexivity” to interrogate how one facet of my identity - that of an academic- psychologist, relates to the theory in nuanced yet direct ways (Chan et al., 2018, p. 60; Cole, 2020). This involves taking into account and recognising that some Professional identities are privileged over others, together with the pressure of presenting oneself as a competent Professional across a range of settings (Adamson & Johansson, 2016). Academics adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of the institutions in which they work (Sheridan, 2013); self-critical educators examine not only what they are teaching students, but also their methods of teaching, recognising their own positioning as instructors (Cordova & Mendoza Knecht, 2019; Wallin-Ruschman et al., 2020).

The teaching of psychology tends to be centred on the individual, as mentioned earlier (Wallin-Ruschman et al., 2020). According to Wallin-Ruschman et al. (2020), raising critical consciousness in the teaching of psychology can encourage students to adopt “intersectionality as a lens, action lever, and practice tool in a range of settings” (p. 14). This would encourage students to move from a position of ‘blaming’ the individual for inequalities by taking into account the social determinants, forces and systems that ultimately contribute to inequality (Wallin-Ruschman et al., 2020). However, some students might actually be resistant to learning about and reflecting on injustice and inequality, as Wallin-Ruschman et al. (2020) found in their research on undergraduate psychology students’

experiences of learning about intersectionality. Possibly, students may be reluctant to unpack their own attitudes, assumptions and ways of being: doing so can place them in an undesired and uncomfortable position which could be experienced as potentially destabilising (Wallin- Ruschman et al., 2020). Wallin-Ruschman et al. (2020) also noted that privileged students felt that intersectionality was not relevant to them or that it was unrelated to their lives; the authors concluded by observing that “teaching intersectionality in a space occupied by a high number of privileged students risked creating more harm for those with already marginalised identities” (Wallin-Ruschman et al., 2020, p. 24). Students who have encountered discrimination, marginalisation and oppression might potentially re-experience this within the educational establishment, thus affecting their wellbeing (Chan et al., 2018).

Addressing and taking into account privilege within academic contexts can therefore generate varied responses in both students and instructors (Chan et al. 2018). Chan et al. (2018) urged educators to consider their own privileges and how these can be enacted; for example, self-disclosures on the part of educators can potentially facilitate closeness or engender division between students and academics, depending on how such disclosures are shared by the educator and then interpreted and perceived by students (Chan et al., 2018). I am mindful of Cherry-McDaniel's (2017) warning that educators can potentially position students as “things to be studied and named”, thus objectifying them and their experiences in a pejorative manner (p. 42).

We navigate privilege and oppression across diverse contexts and moments in time (Chan et al., 2018). This mirrors my own personal and Professional identity and experiences, past and present. Unwrapping these experiences and attempting to make sense of them through the lens of intersectionality does not make them any less painful; however, it does make them more understandable, despite their nuanced complexity. Ultimately, it is these intersecting features that have shaped my commitment to develop a responsive “ethic of caring” in relation to positional difference, including my own and that of others (Grant, 2018, p. 329).

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# Intersectional vectors of power and illegalized, racialized bodies

Some theoretical reflections on sex work in Malta

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## ABSTRACT

Research conducted elsewhere indicates that the majority of sex workers operating in Western Europe are migrants. Over the past decade Malta has witnessed a significant increase in immigration from around the world, but to date, no research has been conducted in relation to migration and sex work in Malta. This article is limited in scope. Drawing on the work of critical intersectional and post-structural feminists, it seeks to explore how a situated analysis, that is attentive to different vectors of power, might provide valuable insights into how the racialization and illegalization of asylum seekers intersects with sex work, and how this might impact the lived experiences of sex workers in Malta.

## KEY WORDS

Sex work, intersectionality, prostitution, migrants

This article is written in light of the consultation process on Human Trafficking<sup>1</sup> and Prostitution in Malta<sup>2</sup>. Not enough is known about contemporary sex work in Malta<sup>3</sup>. Whilst it is generally acknowledged that the majority of sex workers in Malta are cis women, this by no means captures the complete and complex picture. Given the marginalization, stigmatisation and criminalisation that shrouds sex work around the world, data around who engages in sex work, where and how, is considered sketchy at best (Amnesty International, 2022). This is further problematic given the confusion and contestation around conceptualisation and categorisation. That said, it is generally accepted that globally, the majority of sex workers identify as cis women, but transgender people and cis men also make up significant numbers. Sex work is generally precarious work, marked by insecurity and exploitation. The work can be irregular and/or seasonal, and might include working from home, sub-contracting and self-employment. In Western Europe, the percentage of migrant sex workers within the broader sex worker population is also contested, ranging from around 65% (PICUM, 2019) to an estimated 97% of “indoor prostitution” in the Republic of Ireland (Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009).

Over the past two decades Malta has experienced increased migration from around the world. This includes the arrival of asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean Sea by boat, and migrants from all over the planet – so called expats, digital nomads, seasonal workers, and so on – travelling to Malta in search of employment and a better life. Between 2013 and 2020 the population of Malta increased by around 18% as a result of immigration (NSO, 2021). These statistics include persons who sought asylum in Malta, but do not include irregularly residing and undocumented migrants.

In my own work with young asylum seekers, in particular with young women, I have argued that our analysis must include legal status and age as vectors of intersecting power (see for example Pisani, 2012; Pisani, 2018). Drawing on this research and my experiences working in the field, in this article I will be focusing on how the intersections of sex work and the racialized politics of ‘illegalized migration’ might impact the lives of asylum seekers and other migrants in Malta<sup>4</sup>.

Whilst my research and practice has focused on asylum seekers, there are other migrants residing in Malta who may find themselves living in similar legal precarity, including persons who applied for protection in another Member State and are residing in Malta, migrants who have the right to reside in Malta but do not have permission to take up regular employment, and migrants whose residency permit has expired or was denied<sup>5</sup>. There is broad recognition that Malta’s economy has depended on migrants working in the so-called ‘shadow economy’ (Malta Today, 2021). Whilst there is no consensus on the definition, the term ‘shadow economy’ generally ‘includes all market-based production of legal goods and services that are deliberately concealed from public authorities’ (Schneider & Williams, 2013). Debono (2021) describes an increasingly ‘utilitarian’ approach to employing migrant workers in Malta, but that their welcome contribution to the Maltese economy has not translated in to the provision of decent work, but rather, is marked by exploitation and potentially illegal working conditions. Similarly, a recent article by the Union Haddiema Maghqudin (UHM) (a Maltese workers union) described the situation as one of “modern slavery”, a context that offers “no employment safeguards at all, no social benefits, sick leave, vacation leave, salary rates below the minimum wage and no occupational health and safety safeguards” (UHM, 2021:np).

## BEYOND PATRIARCHY

The work of Kimberly Crenshaw (1989) is generally recognized as putting a name to a historical body of knowledge: intersectionality. Since Crenshaw originally adopted the term as a ‘Black Feminist Critique’ to demonstrate the “tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (p.139), intersectionality research has become a burgeoning field in its own right. The work of Crenshaw (1989), Hill Collins (1998) and others, have contributed to a body of knowledge that positions intersectionality as a heuristic

device to 'expose how single-axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice' (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787).

Crenshaw (1991) introduced the analogy of a traffic intersection, with traffic coming from four directions. Each traffic flow represented different forms of discrimination, and as such, in imagining a collision at the intersection, we are able to see the different forms of discrimination coming from various directions, and perhaps at the same time. Taking on this metaphor, we can consider the sex worker at the intersection, and begin to understand how different forms of structural violence and discrimination may collide for different sex workers, including, but of course not limited to ciswomen, ciswomen of colour, gay men, illegalized black migrants and so on. These different forms may include patriarchy, racism, homophobia, ageism, ableism, statism and many others. Importantly, the metaphor points to the limitations of understanding sex work through a single-axis lens – namely gender – and the need to broaden our understanding of different power structures beyond patriarchy. Expanding on this point, we can also begin to see how different structural powers at the intersection differ and evolve according to spatial and temporal factors, discursive formations and apparatus of control. As such, the ontology of power (including inter alia patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity and nation) differ – they must not, and cannot, be fused, diluted, sidelined or ignored in order to maintain some kind of meta-feminist position, theory or political strategy. A situated and temporal analysis will also be attentive to the specificities of a given context and particular intersectionalities, for example in Malta this might include proximity, the residues of religion and migration.

I would argue that in order to understand the lives and experiences of sex workers in Malta, we need a feminist analysis that seeks to understand how patriarchy is entangled with capitalist exploitation, the apparatus of the Nation state, racial domination and other forms of oppression. But this is not enough. A critical intersectional analysis needs to be attentive to the differential positionings within different identity groups and the dynamics of power (for example 'women', 'migrants', 'citizens'), and how the boundaries of these categories are always contested with implications for political representation (for example cis-women, trans-women and who counts as 'woman' in the first place).

Importantly, then, different vectors of power must not be conflated with different identity categories. The point is not to represent different identities within 'one' (woman) whilst also recognizing that power can also be productive and not exclusively oppressive: agency needs to be included in our understanding and analysis of sex work. The work of post-structuralist feminists (see for example Haraway, 1988; Butler, 1999) is helpful here in questioning the presumed 'essence' of woman and normative accounts that reinforce the gender binary and oppression whilst also dismissing discrimination between different categories of women. Adopting a heteronormative lens, defining women exclusively by the lust of men, and excluding differences between women, their different journeys and desires are all narratives that diminish and control different womens' experiences (Haraway, 1988).

In the following section I hope to provide some insights into how an intersectional approach would be attentive to the way different vectors of power (racism, sexism, the nation state and legal status) are produced and entangled (discursively, institutionally, legally, relationally, materially) within the context of illegalized and racialized migration in Malta, and how this might impact the lived experiences and realities of sex workers.

## THE CITIZENSHIP ASSUMPTION

In day-to-day discourse, notions of citizenship are taken up as a hegemonic norm, wherein certain rights associated with citizenship, including for example, the right to vote, access to healthcare, employment and education and formal membership in a political community, are often assumed to be shared equally. Elsewhere I have described this as the 'citizenship assumption' (Pisani, 2012). The legal status of the noncitizen in Malta – the migrant – covers

a variety of statuses that are accompanied by different access to rights, protections and security, including (but not limited to) access to welfare benefits, access to employment, access to the national health service, and the right to remain. The type of formal legal status, will also determine the degree to which an individual can plan, invest and hope for the future (Vaughan-Williams & Pisani, 2018; Anderson, 2019). Importantly, legal status also affects an individual's institutional relations (and here I include the police and judiciary) and social relations (including with employers, neighbours, pimps and johns) – a point I will revert to.

Yuval Davis et al. (2018) make a distinction between feelings of belonging and the politics of belonging. The former relates to emotional attachment, feeling safe, feeling at home. It is a material and affective space moulded by the mundane, the smiles and the frustrations that create memories. Home is also a space for hope, a hope that comes with building plans for the future and feeling secure. A cursory review of the past 20 years of border politics in Malta, provides more than enough insight into how the notions of belonging, constructions of 'Malteseness' and racialized border politics, are also performed in the day to day and continue to serve political agendas. The technologies of everyday bordering extend within and throughout the national territory and are enacted to generate a sense of safety for those who belong, simultaneously generating a sense of precarity, fear and often terror for those who are constructed as a threat to the nation (see also Yuval-Davis et al., 2018). The materiality of legal status and border politics are real and visible, and they cannot and must not be ignored or side-lined in our discussions on sex work in Malta. Continuing a legacy going back two decades, the situation for asylum seekers in Malta continues to be marked by human rights violations and policies that drive individuals into poverty and desperation. The list and extent of abuses cannot all be documented here, but include the illegal detention of asylum seekers, among them children (ECHR, 2013; CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021), illegal push backs to a war zone, ignoring distress calls and placing lives at risk (Amnesty International, 2020) and policy revisions impacting access to employment. The latter deprives hundreds of individuals and families of the basic resources necessary to secure a level of human dignity, further exposing them to poverty and exploitation (Malta Refugee Council, 2021). Basic 'rights' that are generally assumed to be universal, including, but not limited to free access to state health services, welfare benefits, child allowance and paid maternity leave are denied to many migrants, also contributing to the feminization of poverty (Pisani, 2011). Political rhetoric and policy development are couched within a racialised discourse that is amplified throughout social media and has become a part of acceptable daily parlance (see for example ENAR, 2013; Mainwaring & Debono, 2021) The situation is such that some within the present Government describe institutional racism in Malta as 'a source of alarm and urgently needs to be addressed' (Parliamentary Secretariat for Equality and Reforms, 2020:7). Despite this, a 'citizen first' approach has been embraced within political rhetoric, and, as evidenced above, unapologetically reinforced through policy and practice, and there is little reason to believe the situation will change any day soon.

This has important ethical and epistemological implications as to how we understand sex work in Malta, including how we theorise choice, vulnerability and the ontology of the body as elements of relational embodiment, embedded within the inter/national distribution of power, including the production of grotesque inequalities, and the ongoing racialisation and militarisation of borders (see also Pisani, 2012; Vaughan-Williams & Pisani, 2018). It also points to the need to theorise how the tentacles of global structural inequalities extend within the national border, affecting sex workers' lives.

A situated intersectional lens would require us to also reflect on the perspectives and actions that feed into political decisions taken at the hegemonic centre (Yuval Davis, 2013), and how these policy decisions might affect the lives of racialised, illegalized sex workers. For example, research conducted elsewhere, has demonstrated how the introduction of the Nordic Model led to an increase in racial Prof.iling, surveillance and deportation of migrant sex workers, and as a consequence, sex workers are also less likely to report violence (see for example Amnesty International, 2016). Findings of ethnographic research conducted in Finland, Norway and Sweden, further makes

the point that in contexts where the majority of sex workers are migrants, the regulation of sex work has shifted from sex work to immigration policies (Vuolajärvi, 2018). The research also provides some alarming insights into how this increased targeting and surveillance by police (including online) intersects with race, and how such policy decisions have impacted policing tactics, pushing sex workers further into the shadows, exposing them to more exploitation and danger. In Malta, deportation and forced return remains a 'pillar' of the Government's migration strategy (The Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security and Law Enforcement, 2021). For those facing deportation in Malta, their bodies are already outlawed, and as such, whilst a cash transaction may be protected by law, their bodies are not. The transaction cannot be separated from their ontology and materiality as a racialised and/or illegalized subject. As such, highlighting the vulnerability of migrant sex workers without addressing the vectors of power that produce this vulnerability, suggests that any response will not address the variance in the positionings of power (and relationships therein) in which different sex workers find themselves. Failure to recognize this fundamental point is tantamount to dismissing her very being, she is erased: not woman enough, not white enough, not legal enough, not human enough.

## CONCLUSION

Policy development cannot happen within a research void<sup>6</sup>, and research on sex work in Malta must be considered within the historical moment, marked by differences and evolving experiences. This article is limited in scope, and seeks to explore how a situated, critical intersectional approach, attentive to different power axes, might provide valuable insights into sex work and how it intersects with the racialisation and illegalization of migrant sex workers in Malta. To say that there is a dearth of empirical data on sex work in Malta, fails to capture the ethical implications of this void. Very little is known of migrant sex workers' perspectives, the struggles and obstacles that they encounter every day, the complexities and ethical dilemmas that they negotiate within constraining circumstances, nor the meanings that they give to their day to day experiences. We do not know how sex work intersects with border technologies, surveillance and the broader policing of racialised, illegalized bodies in Malta.

Whilst I continue to advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work in Malta, I will also add that I believe that no policy approach will provide a panacea for the problems and violence faced by many sex workers in Malta. Nor do I seek to impose a 'representational' or group perspective of illegalized sex workers of colour. Rather, I ask that advocacy, service provision and research be attentive and respectful to the different experiences and perspectives of sex workers in Malta, and attentive to how different vectors of power intersect, producing complex and situated realities. It is only when such important (urgent) work has been carried out, that we can even begin to start thinking about what an informed policy approach might look like.

- 1 Human trafficking (which includes non-sex related crimes) is a crime and human rights violation, and is not the focus of this paper. For the purpose of this paper, sex work refers to the provision of diverse and evolving sexual services (for example sexual intercourse, lap dancing etc.) for the exchange of money or goods, between consenting adults. Elsewhere (Pisani, 2021) I have argued against the approach adopted by those advocating for the Nordic Model (see for example Civil Society Joint Submission, 2019) that perceives all forms of sex work as violence. Whilst stepping away from the simplistic yes/no binary, I recognize the agency that sex workers demonstrate, often under circumstances that may not be of their choosing.
- 2 In September, 2019, the Parliamentary Secretariat for Reforms, Citizenship and Simplification of Administrative Processes, launched a consultation process on Human Trafficking and Prostitution in Malta. The consultation was presented as the first phase towards establishing a national strategy against human trafficking, as well as 'laying the groundwork for further consultations and dialogue about prostitution in Malta' (Reform on Human Trafficking and Prostitution: Public Consultation Document, 2019:1). The consultation needs to be framed within the broader context of Trafficking in Malta, and the measures the Government of Malta has taken in this regard. Since ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Government of Malta has adopted a number of measures to develop the institutional and legal framework for combating trafficking in human beings. That said, despite some improvements over the years, Malta fails to 'meet the minimum standards for trafficking' (Department of State, USA, 2021:379; see also GRETA, CoE, 2013).
- 3 Research on sex work in Malta is almost exclusively focused on the historical context and on women drug users who engage in sex work.

- 4 Drawing on the work of Bauder (2014), I am using the term 'illegalization' to draw attention to the political and institutional processes that render an individual as either/both de facto or perceived to be 'illegal', exploitable and beyond the protection of the law. Within the Maltese context, this might include (but not be limited to) asylum seekers who have been denied protection, persons who have not been provided with an opportunity to apply for asylum due to lengthy bureaucratic delays, persons who were originally granted some form of national protection but were subsequently illegalized due to a change in policy (see for example recent revisions to the Special Residence Authorisation (Newsbook, 2020). For the purpose of this paper, the term 'asylum seeker' refers to any individual who intends to, or has applied for asylum, regardless of the final outcome.
- 5 With no sense of irony, the European Commission acknowledges an increase in irregularly residing migrants within the EU due to 'poverty, social and political instability, as well as the limited availability of legal migration routes' (European Commission, nd). Within the EU - and Malta is no exception - emphasis has been placed on combatting irregular migration. Such efforts include strengthening the external borders, increasing border surveillance and deportation.
- 6 A review of the local literature suggests that research has largely focused on the intersections of prostitution and substance use (the work of Anna Vella is notable here), research on the historical context and contemporary legal provisions.

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# Social justice and mental health

## An intersectionality-based approach

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### ABSTRACT

In many countries, the transition from a Medical to a Recovery model has transformed mental health services into ones characterised by an approach that is more inclusive, humane and holistic. Over the years, the recovery approach has gained recognition and power such that its contemporary meaning relates to effectiveness, positivity and power balance in therapeutic systems. However, the aspect of intersectionalism is often neglected and this may hinder the process of recovery for those living with a mental illness. In this article, an intersectional perspective is explored and recommended as the way forward for contemporary mental health systems, in a bid towards ensuring social justice.

## KEYWORDS

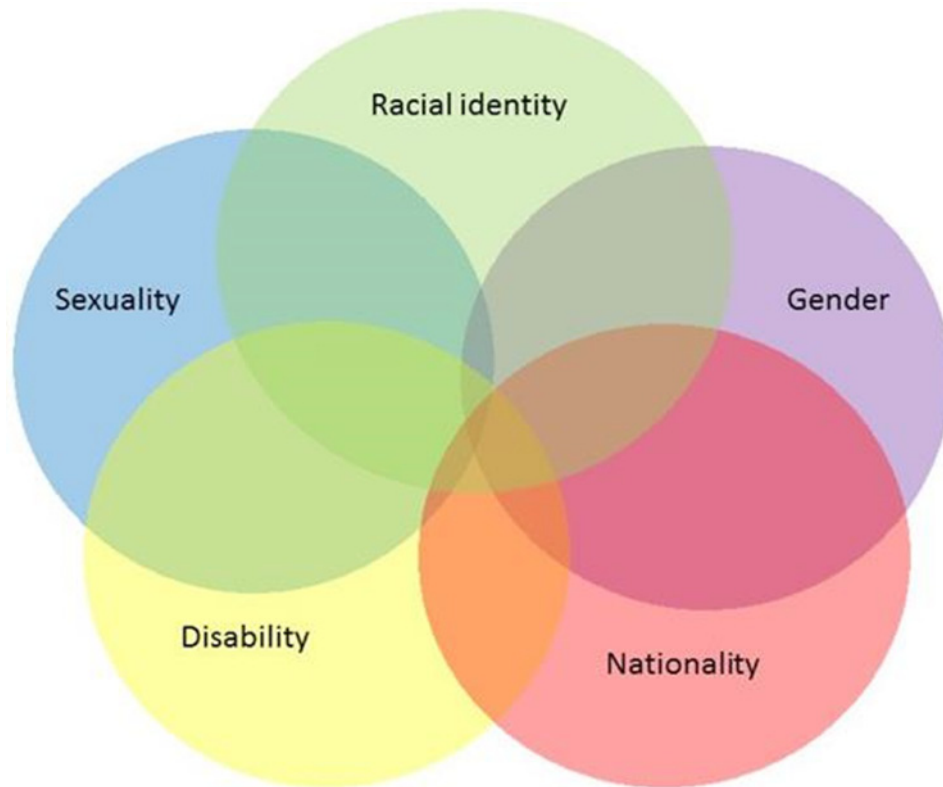
Mental health, intersectionalism, social justice

## INTRODUCTION

Following the dark ages of mental illness and the oppression of the force of the Biomedical Model, the introduction of the concept of Recovery is often regarded as that which catalysed the move towards care models that are guided by humane and holistic principles (Davidson, 2016). High hopes were attributed to this novel concept. In fact, the word 'recovery' itself is commonly understood as being the synonym of all that is ethical and effective in facilitating an individual's journey through the challenging maze that often characterises mental illness. Whilst the roots of the recovery move were fiercely propelled by the psychiatric survivor tide in the 1960s, sixty years onwards, it is necessary to halt and reflect, particularly on how the journey of time and the changes in society have moulded the concept of recovery, as it is contemporarily embraced (Morrow & Weisser, 2012). In fact, such a pause may make it clear that power arising from social and structural aspects has articulated the very meaning of recovery and nowadays, it may be making it even more complex than it had ever been.

## MOVING BEYOND SANISM

The overt and covert causes and effects of stigma related to mental illness are acknowledged as being intricately linked to an individual's experience due to the symptoms and perceived inabilities that may be a part of poor mental health (Mannarini & Rossi, 2018). In this view, speaking about stigma and discrimination had often been traditionally linked to sanism in its pure form. Sanism refers to an irrational prejudice against those living with a mental illness (Perlin, 2013). Contrastingly in this current era, sanism is often closely weaved with other social injustices such as sexism, heterosexism, racialisation and ageism (Morrow & Weisser, 2012). Unsurprisingly, an individual experiencing mental illness may be subjected to more than one of these forms of oppression and these inevitably leave their mark on the recovery route. A social justice analysis of recovery in mental health that hails from an intersectional approach is then urgently needed in order to truly reconstruct the concept of recovery whilst remaining faithful to its roots. At the basic level, there is a need to shift from focusing solely on mental illness and pure sanism to exploring how economic, legal, political, Political, cultural and social processes in society intertwine with each other and impact an individual's recovery journey. A simple representation of this intersectional stance can be viewed in Diagram 1 – as seen, 'disability', which is the niche where mental illness is often seen as being located, is just one of the many forces or processes that may be impacting upon a person's life in society. The diagram's intersections are where individuals commonly reside and so the focus of support structures needs to be on these areas rather than only on any of the individual sectors. Dedicating support energy to the sector of 'disability' only is a blinkered view of offering support to those experiencing mental health difficulties and can easily lead to gaps that are detrimental to the individual's overall well-being.



**Diagram 1: Intersectionality (Taylor 2019)**

## AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS

Borrowing from a Foucauldian philosophy, a deeper intersectional analysis would entail the identification of those who are being oppressed and privileged by this mesh of power in society. This then needs to be followed by an exploration of the inner workings of the oppression mechanism. Since the experience of mental illness is not a standalone phenomenon but takes place in a societal and cultural context, stigma, discrimination and power imbalance may manifest themselves in two ways. First there is the fact that historically, psychiatry has pathologised certain groups of people in society over others. Examples of these groups include those living in poverty and women (Morrow & Weisser, 2012). Thus, certain diagnoses have been more commonly and easily given to certain groups. For instance, a 2019 study showed that there is a tendency for clinicians to misdiagnose African-Americans with schizophrenia as compared to non-Latino whites. The researchers concluded that conscious or unconscious racial bias may be one of the reasons for this trend. However, the fact that those from a racial minority group may perceive hopelessness or mistrust while being supported by a health carer from a racial majority group may have an impact on their way of acting and on how the symptoms are interpreted (Gara et al., 2019). This is worrying considering the fact that schizophrenia is often considered as the condition epitome of serious mental illness.

On an analogous level, certain minorities in society, which are in a vulnerable state that puts them at a higher risk of mental illness, tend to be more subject to stigma and potential discrimination thus having less access to support systems than other groups. For example, a glance at the local situation unveils the widespread reaction when asylum seekers who are being detained, self-harm. Whilst the general population seems to exhibit a degree of empathy and acknowledge that the detainment and asylum-seeking experience is indeed conducive

to psychological difficulties, many assume that self-harming is an attention-seeking act by 'these ungrateful detainees' and so support is not merited. In this manner, the individual is not only being stigmatised because of the psychiatric symptom that they are presenting with but also because of their social status. This is not surprising seeing that disparities in access to mental health services in racial/ ethnic minority groups are evident, and not just locally. Individuals from racial/ethnic minority groups have a lower probability of receiving mental health care. For instance, in 2015, in the United States, among those with a mental illness, 48% of white people managed to access mental health support as compared to only 31% of black and Hispanic populations, and 22% of Asians (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2016). In addition to access problems, health care providers may have a lack of cultural understanding and sensitivity, which often contributes to underdiagnosis and/or misdiagnosis of mental illness in relation to those from racially/ethnically diverse groups. Language differences, fear of stigma amongst minority groups and the variations in cultural presentation of symptoms are some of the factors that may lead to such challenges in patient-carer interactions (American Psychiatric Association, 2017).

Another example would be the link between socioeconomic status and mental illness, basing on the evidence that mental illness commonly leads to poverty and its stigma which, in turn, results in an increased risk of mental disorders (World Health Organisation, 2014).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEMATIC TRANSFORMATION

Whilst literature on oppression in Mental Health is abundant and may often bear a similarity to intersectionalism, it is commonly not deeply focused on the overlapping nature of social injustices and on the complex link between these inequalities and mental health recovery. So, what would it take to transform the mental health care system and does recovery have a role in this? Whilst recovery remains an important guiding concept, intersectionalism needs to be employed. Thus, especially when it comes to mental health, it needs to be acknowledged that working in silos is rather dangerous since this sector is an inevitable part of most of the other societal sectors. In this manner, whilst in a given society, mental health is part of the health sector, it is also a crucial part of the Education sector, the Economic one and of entities that advocate for gender and racial equality, to mention but a few. Exploring and recognising the different forms of discrimination and oppression that may affect those experiencing mental illness may be another crucial step. Social welfare systems, such as the local one, would also benefit from a critical evaluation and update in order to attempt to break the cycles of dependence, poverty and over-affiliation with the biomedical model of mental illness.

## CONCLUSION

Whilst mental distress does have a medical basis, it is also deeply influenced by multiple social factors and negating this simply creates gaps in the recovery journey. Finally, the voice of the ones who experience mental illness needs to be at the forefront in order to identify and navigate around those intersectional factors that have the potential to support or hinder recovery. These individuals are the ones who are bearing the full force of the power imbalances arising from the different aspects of societal life and listening to their story may be a crucial bridge between the silo services that often exist in society.

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# Social Justice

A utopian dream or dystopian nightmare?

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## ABSTRACT

In its utopian ideal, social justice offers equitable access and entitlement to wealth, opportunities, and resources. It promises all people equal rights and responsibilities and indiscriminate treatment and access to goods and services. In its dystopian practice, social justice is nothing but a beautiful empty buzzword, an electoral catcher for politicians and policy makers and a long-sought dream, yet recurrent nightmare to social activists and visionaries. This paper aims to address the gap between the utopic vision of social justice and its dystopian practice by examining the processes through which the utopic vision of social justice is debased to dystopian practices. Processes, typified by prejudice, discrimination, inequalities and a myriad range of injustices, entrenched within widening disparities in poverty and exclusion, and oppressive and exploitative practices across both national and global agendas. These dystopian practices emerging from high-level superficial and contradictory narratives

and policy processes constitute both a determinant factor and consequential outcome of deep-seated structural injustices embedded within the global rule of neo-liberal capitalism. Despite the dystopian hegemony of the neoliberal agenda spreading unbridled apathy and individualism, the utopic vision of social justice persists. This vision, embodied through micro-level grassroots everyday practices of justice, offers a glimpse of hope for the “dangers of a world indifferent to justice” (The International Forum for Social Development, 2006: p.80) by reappropriating the meaning and significance of social justice and making the dream somewhat closer to reality.

## KEYWORDS

Social justice, interdisciplinarity, sustainable development, structural injustice

## THE UTOPIC DREAM: SOCIAL JUSTICE

In its utopian vision, social justice promises all people the indiscriminate access and partaking of power, wealth and resources. Thus, despite being defined, contested and asserted in many ways, such that it “has many connotations and uses” (Gordon et al., 2017, p. 68), a main underlying feature of social justice is its fight against “inequality and oppression” (Frazer, 2009, p.7). Given the multitude and multivariate drivers of inequality and oppression, social justice addresses a wide range of issues, ranging from “racism and xenophobia, classism and economic discrimination, sexism and misogyny, homophobia and heterosexism, religious and political persecution, the abuse of civil liberties, and ableism” (Frazer, 2009, p.7). It is thus inherently interdisciplinary by engaging with a wide range of policy domains which constitute important determinants for the quality of life and well-being. Social justice is deeply rooted and intrinsically linked to democratic principles, including the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law, due process protections, pluralism, and good governance.

As in a democracy power needs to be exercised either directly or indirectly by the people, social justice relies on the assertion of people of their fundamental rights and freedoms and their demand to equal treatment before the law and in all areas of economic and social life. Social justice is an empowering tool and ultimately resides on active citizenship and participation and the decentralisation and diffusion of power.

Social justice is more than just a value and an ethical guiding principle on the macro and micro level. It is embedded in the way of life through the practical implementation of the ideals and values of equality, equity, and protection of human rights and freedoms. It is based on the full appreciation and not mere tolerance of diversity. Indeed, social justice demands equality in diversity in the recognition that we are “all different all equal”. It thus demands recognition that these differences may require different opportunities, resource allocations and redistributive measures for justice to prevail. Equality of diversity within a social justice framework thus resides on equitability, as a precursor to the “equality of the burdens, the advantages, and the opportunities of citizenship” (Papageorgiou, 1980, p.110).

As citizens in a democracy can enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms, if everyone protects and upholds the rights and freedoms of others, social justice demands that people fight actively not only for their own emancipation but also for the liberation of others, particularly those who are not positioned to voice and fight their injustices. Social justice thus demands that citizens are key stakeholders in the policy making and implementation process through interdisciplinary action across all levels of transformative practices - from awareness raising, advocacy, lobbying and campaigning, legal and policy change and service provision. Apart from its policy work, social justice action ultimately resides on everyday practices and life-style choices.

Since social justice demands equitable access and distribution to power, wealth and resources, it largely depends on the efficacy of redressing disadvantage through redistributive measures. Redistributive measures being determined by government policy reflect the political ideology of those in power. The politics of social policy demonstrates that left-wing regimes tend to be more favourable to institutional welfare and the public provision of goods and services, whereas those on the right, adopt a more market-based approach with limited welfare provision (Spicker, 2014). While left-wing ideologies are more likely to consider poverty and inequality as a structural feature which can and should be addressed through tough redistributive measures, those on the right are more likely to blame the poor and disadvantaged through weak redistributive systems and limited protection coverage. Whereas within a collectivist regime, justice is envisioned as a universal right, through a neoliberal approach it becomes a charitable feat.

Despite that both charity and human rights share “a commitment to redressing disadvantage” (Parachin, 2016, p.1), they differ on fundamental principles of social justice. While charity is based on “benefaction – the voluntary choice to share” (Parachin, 2016, p.2); a moral yet unenforceable act, human rights entail enforceable claims which are constitutionally protected. Recognition of the inalienability, interdependence and indivisibility between civil and political, and social, economic and cultural rights underpins the holistic nature of social justice.

Thus, the universal protection of rights and freedoms are an important constituent for social justice, as is active citizenship and participation. Social justice implies that the equitable distribution of power, wealth and resources should not depend upon the benevolence of those in power but legitimised through concrete action. A strong redistributive policy, legally and culturally entrenched, thus constitutes the fundamentals of just and good governance.

In an unjust regime, might makes right, and power, wealth and resources are centralised and unequally distributed. Under an unjust regime, the disparities between the have and have nots, those who are included and excluded, and those who are oppressor and oppressed are widened and intensified. This is the dystopian nightmare of our worldly reality!

## THE DYSTOPIAN NIGHTMARE: INJUSTICE

From time immemorial, life was and remains unjust. From the master and slave in Ancient Times, the monarchical and feudal system in the Middle Ages and the Bourgeoisie and Proletariat in Modern Industrial Societies, society was characterised by the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and exploited, the haves and have nots. Framing this Marxist class-based analysis within the wider structural features of oppression and exploitation, the history of humanity is the history of injustices based on a wide range of isms – sexism, racism, ageism, heterosexism, ableism, elitism, etc.

Historically, democracy as a political ideological construct, was a main driver for the promotion of equality, such that “welfare provision has grown hand in hand with democracy” (Spicker, 2021). Yet, democracy in its neo-liberal form has grossly fallen short of providing for the just distribution of wealth, power and resources. On the other hand, it has resulted in a situation where the rich got richer and the poor poorer.

Poverty is synonymous with injustice. It impacts on all areas of a person’s life - from physical, social and psychological well-being to cultural and political participation – it is indeed a determinant not only of the quality of life but of life itself, by affecting life expectancy and morbidity. Poverty increases vulnerability, victimisation, social exclusion and discrimination, whilst economic power yields further political and ideological influence.

The “contention that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer appears to be largely based on fact” (The International Forum for Social Development, 2006, p.1). Accompanying this widening disparity in relative poverty, which situation is predicted to get bleaker, also due to an expected rise in inflation, lies the persistent reality of extreme and absolute poverty, particularly in developing countries. Whether measured in absolute or relative terms, poverty indicators point to ineffective redistributive measures, lack of egalitarian policies and limited opportunities for social mobility.

This state of affairs is evident on both the intranational and the international level as neo-liberal globalisation has resulted in new forms of subjugation and a more complex and multi-layered relationship between oppressor and oppressed. “An imperialist world order has emerged, dominated by multinational corporations and promoted by supranational institutions” (Vella, 2020, p.291). Economic development overrides social and environmental wellbeing as evidenced from gross environmental degradation, poverty and other forms of injustices. Progress gets calculated in economic growth not quality-of-life, yet Prof.it and “GDP does not ripple down as it accrues in the hands of the minority” (Vella, 2020, p.292) to the extent that the assets of the top 200 corporations double those of 80% of all humanity (Global Policy Forum, 2000). Indeed, “rising inequality has accompanied the march towards corporatoracy” (West, 2017, para. 28).

Prevalent discourses of social justice shrouded in political narratives of equality of opportunity, meritocracy and fair competition accompany the neo-liberal agenda, while social justice transmutes into the arrogance of corporate social responsibility and the patronising distribution of means-tested welfare provision. Meritocracy and equality of opportunity convert to the freedom to operate within a tyrannical free market. Social justice becomes a charitable action, civil and political rights a perfunctory while “fundamental socio- and cultural rights - education, healthcare, social security - become a privilege, increasingly dependent on private insurance and bank credit” (Vella, 2020, p.292).

The advocacy of capitalist justice that ‘everyone should be rewarded equally according to their productivity, effort or contribution’, provides the ideological backing for blaming the poor, the unprivileged and the disadvantaged. Capitalist justice constitutes an oxymoron. It confutes the ‘true’ meaning of social justice and corrupts its fundamental principle by taking wealth, power and resources from the people and concentrating it among the few – “in the process disempowering the people and empowering...the powerful elite” (Vella, 2020, p.290). Justice becomes the right of corporatocracies - to decide ‘who’ should be rewarded ‘what’ for ‘productivity, effort and contribution’ which fattens their pockets and inflates political egos. Justice becomes synonymous with the oppression and exploitation of those who find themselves at the mercy of the global market with no power, wealth and resources to assert oneself. Cheap labour, precarious employment and Prof.it convert to two sides of the same coin - capitalist justice.

Indeed, “what is given to the people is in the form of tokenism...a triviality” (Vella, 2020, p.290). Tokenism also permeates progressive policy and legislative change - the establishment of gender and disability quotas, same-sex marriage, hate crimes and other ‘equality’ and ‘non-discriminatory’ policies - as long as these appease the public, translate in added political support, do not perturb the status quo or incumber the efficacy of the market. Whilst inherently just and progressive, such measures serve as an implicit instrument to ‘legitimise praxis’ (Vella, 2020), denoting a false sense of commitment to equality and social justice, whilst consolidating the power of the elite and its exploitative practices. Indeed, on both a local and global level, “there is little indication of any real ongoing commitment to address existing inequalities...reflecting a general trend that is morally unfair, politically unwise and economically unsound” (United Nations and International Forum for Social Development, 2006, p.2).

The discrepancy between the dream for social justice and the nightmarish practices evident in contemporary forms of capitalist justice as evinced from its immorality, unfairness, unwise politics and unsound economics hence demands the establishment of a new world order.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE: FROM DYSTOPIA TO UTOPIA

Social justice within a capitalist neo-liberal agenda, embedded in a post-colonial mindset is a delusion. The world is ruled by a corporatocracy where market forces and Prof.it reign over social and environmental rights. In theory, capitalism Prof.esses individual rights and freedoms, in practice, it thrives on oppression and exploitation, making the strong, stronger, and the weak, weaker. Economic and social inequalities conjoin and augment injustice, in the process consolidating the unfairness of existing neo-liberal practices. Narratives of human rights and justice are replayed by policy makers as empty buzzwords and electoral catchers while various institutionalised forms of legislative frameworks and redistributive policies give the illusion of equity and equality.

While this situation portrays the grim reality of social justice in present day societies, is this injustice the 'end of history', the bitter end to a utopic dream and the perpetuation of its dystopian nightmare? Is it possible to wake up from the nightmare and re-envision the dream?

Re-envisioning the meaning of social justice must first and foremost start with the re-appropriation of narratives through a rethinking of 'what' constitutes justice, 'to whom' and 'for whom'. It also demands a rethinking of 'how' justice can best be served.

Social justice demands the re-establishment of poverty as the main underlying and overarching factor in theorising justice. Economic justice is a precursor to social justice. Depoliticising and de-structuring poverty through liberal narratives such as social exclusion tends to abrogate political responsibility for structural inequalities. Despite extensive contention on both a theoretical and policy level as to how poverty is to be defined and measured, the right to economic freedom is rarely contested despite being "one of the reasons for the widening of inequalities in income distribution" (United Nations & International Forum for Social Development, 2006, p.4).

Social justice also demands recognition of the way the neoliberal agenda has confuted its underlying principle; from equity to one of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity without any accompanying structural and equitable changes for everyone to start on an equal footing "does not address inequality...but only differential access" (International Panel on Social Progress, 2018, p.107). Justice thus entails a move from the capitalist justice notion of 'equal reward for productivity, effort or contribution' to the Marxist dictum; "from each according to his ability; to each according to his needs".

An interdisciplinary approach to social justice demands that the existing divide between enforceable civil and political rights and the unenforceable social economic and cultural rights is addressed, such that both dimensions are legally safeguarded. Social justice thus entails the recognition that human rights as inalienable, indivisible and interdependent.

Ultimately, other than an agreed *raison d'etre*, social justice necessitates a drastic upheaval in the status quo. It entails the redistribution of power, wealth and resources from privileged towards the unprivileged. Yet, many issues which concern the plight of those facing injustice tend to be conveniently disregarded, marginalised, or subjected to the patronising attitude of charity, the conceit of corporate social responsibility and the inadequacy of social benefits. Persons suffering injustice are often regarded as passive recipients, subjects of pity and charity if not outright abusers of welfare systems. Despite the positive recent shifts which envision disadvantaged groups

as autonomous active participants, structural barriers to equality are rarely questioned, and vulnerability is still perceived as a personal ailment, rather than the result of a discriminatory social structure.

Social justice thus necessitates a radical re-imagination rather than a simple reform in distributional justice. Whilst the value of social policy for improving the quality of life of disadvantaged groups cannot be negated or underestimated, as in the case of charity, welfare provision is intrinsically patronising and no amount of reform can solve the problems caused by the structural injustice arising from the neo-liberal agenda. As solicited by the 'Economy of Francesco', the need has come to "develop a new economics for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one that responds to the challenges of our times" and addresses the existing "complacency in the face of suffering and to the inadvertent destruction of the Earth itself" (Annett and Sachs, 2022, para.2-7).

Correspondingly, social policy is increasingly becoming characterised by market-based approaches - active inclusion policies, tapering of benefits and flexicurity practices - which facilitate and extend, rather than thwart the exploitative practices of capitalism. Thus, a radical upheaval of the ideological construct and practical application of social policy - from reactive, means tested market-based mechanisms to enabling and empowering universal provisions - is warranted if social justice is to prevail in the face of the unfortunate scale of the current 'globalisation of indifference' (Pope Francis, 2013). Despite the dystopian hegemony of the neoliberal agenda, fuelling unsustainable practices and ousting social justice through market-based policies, a "shared sense that the state will not do and is not doing what needs to be done" (Euben, 1996, p.73) and the proliferation of rhetorical discourse of justice "emptying the term of its significance...egalitarian politics retain merit" (Trend, 1996, p.17).

The vision for social justice is certainly worth fighting for. From the victories of the slave-abolition, the women's suffragette, the civil rights, sexual liberation to the environmental and anti-globalisation movements, history demonstrates that rights and freedoms were never bestowed freely and easily from above, but only achieved through "ceaseless struggles and popular resistances" (Szolucha, 2018, para. 2).

Against this blatant contempt for social justice, radical action often constitutes the only feasible means for people to defend themselves against discrimination and injustice. Truly, history recites a counter narrative – "the relentless struggle of people everywhere, mostly the oppressed and exploited" (Vella, 2020, p.295) to establish and reassert their rights and freedoms, echoing the view that whilst "there are no relations of power without resistances", (Foucault, 1980a, p.142), "a right is nothing unless it comes to life in the defence which occasions its invocation" (Foucault, 1980b, p.80).

These relentless practices of resistance offer a glimpse of hope for the "dangers of a world indifferent to justice" (The International Forum for Social Development, 2006, p.80) through the re-appropriation of the meaning and significance of social justice, and its transformation from a nightmarish dream to reality, in the praxis that; "You must be the change you wish to see" (Gandhi, 1989).

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# The invisibility of old men carers in Malta's ageing care policy

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## ABSTRACT

While women continue to perform the majority of unpaid care work throughout different life stages, the number of old men engaging in caring roles for ailing wives or partners is increasing. Yet, informal carers continue to be misrecognised as a homogenous cohort of women with men carers, especially old men, remaining an insufficiently researched and overlooked cohort and almost invisible in ageing care policy. This article embeds this postulation in the Maltese context which is characterised by two key policies on ageing welfare, the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing and the National Dementia Strategy, to investigate the extent that they identify and meet the support needs of old men carers. It seeks to convey an understanding of the caring activities old men carers engage in and to elaborate the implications for gendered-sensitive and lifewide community care policy with a focus on intersectional perspectives and implications.

## KEYWORDS

Women, old men, ageing, unpaid care work, active ageing, dementia

## INTRODUCTION

Women have shouldered and still perform the lion's share of unpaid care work/informal care throughout different life stages (Patterson & Margolis, 2019). However, recent studies demonstrated that more old men<sup>1</sup> are currently undertaking an informal carer's role (hereafter, carer). For instance, while the highest percentages of all carers and carers aged 65-plus in the United Kingdom are women (58% and 52% respectively), this percentage alters as carers reach later life with 59% of carers aged 85-plus being men (Carers UK, 2015). In view of shifting contemporary trends in family structures and living arrangements, alongside the wish to age-in-place, the projected reduction in life expectancy gap between men and women, and a gender disability gap echoing women's experience of greater morbidity, it is anticipated that more old men will become the primary carers for their spouse or partner in the foreseeable future (Rykkje & Tranvåg, 2019). Yet, a consistent issue in the planning and implementation of ageing welfare policy is that, despite that the informal care experience is multifaceted and varies considerably from one person to another, carers are generally misrecognised as a homogenous cohort of women (Bertogg & Strauss, 2020). Men carers, particularly old men, remain an insufficiently researched cohort and practically invisible in ageing care policy, so that their support needs are neglected and under-researched (Formosa, 2021a). This article embeds this postulation in the Maltese context to investigate the extent that local ageing policies identify and meet the support needs of old men carers.

## OLD MEN AS CARERS: INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

Gender role conflict has been found to affect men's behaviour towards pursuing assistance, especially with respect to psychological and emotional support. Embodied standpoints on masculinity tend to avert men from explicitly talking about the hitches they are experiencing as carers, reaching out to others merely in times of crisis (Hughes et al., 2017). Yet, gender-grounded social roles are context specific and infused by other social historical and cultural variances (Kilvington-Dowd & Robertson, 2020). Despite that gender has been considered as a core element in influencing men's styles and experiences of informal care, the way in which gender intersects with other social categories including age, class, sexuality and race and how these coalesce to yield exclusive social locations and experiences has not been taken much into account. The organisation of power in society and individual's life experiences are better fathomed as being effected by various axes that work collectively and impact each other (Collins & Bilge, 2016). An intersectionality approach is not simply an additive perspective that situates together inequalities founded solely on gender and on race but draws a specific depiction of inequality that translates across cohorts. While any single position might be most outstanding in a specific setting, one experiences gender, race, class, sexuality and age concurrently (Calasanti, 2019). Hence, this approach recognises that social locations are interwoven and should not be seen as disjointed, accentuating the unending negotiation process of power relations and how individuals and cohorts can experience oppression as well as power contemporaneously (Chaplin et al., 2019). This framework is concerned with social justice and equity and comprehends social location to be formed by the effects of interrelating and equally forming structures and social processes, as influenced by location, power and time (Hankivsky, 2012).

An intersectionality approach can be used to examine multiple social locations amid diverse cohorts (inter-group similarities and differences) or within a particular group (intra-group similarities and differences) by explicating how social structures traverse in specific backgrounds to permit and/or limit agency. Therefore, it can serve to uncover the accompanying advantage and/or relegation of old men carers (Kilvington-Dowd & Robertson, 2020). Moreover, as cohorts age, they carry with them particular gender identities formed by variations in men's and women's relations to and within such domains as work and family. Thereby, as men transit into old age, they carry

along their former experiences, their gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, social and economic capital amid other facets. For instance, old men experiencing mid- and later life in the initial decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are likely to have experienced dissimilar life courses than younger and older generations since each generation is exposed to dissimilar historical experiences which form their viewpoints and approaches (Attias-Donfut & Arber, 2000). Characteristically, the current generation of old Maltese men were the main breadwinners whereas the present cohort of old heterosexual women were in charge of domestic work (Azzopardi, 2017). This outlines the importance of understanding the influence of gender patterns, former and present life experiences, the social context and the effect of one's generation on how care is understood and organised (Cosmas d'Argemir, 2016). Despite sharing a similar kinship bond not all old men carers are engaged in care work by the same degree, thus denoting the importance of understanding all the facets that intersect and shape the multiplicity of ways in which old men carry out intra-couple unpaid care work in later life (Kilvington-Dowd & Robertson, 2020). It is thus noteworthy that while an intersectional approach underlines age as a social category it also underlines how age does not trump other dissimilarities and inequalities.

The experiences of old men carers are complex, ambivalent, varied and reliant on the individual's life experience contesting clear-cut interpretations of men as either ineffectual or adept carers. With limited informal care work experience in former years, old men are many times unaccustomed on how to accomplish activities related to such context. Through different strategies, old men strive to uphold continuousness in their rapport with their spouse/partner along with forming and changing roles so to deal with life transformations. Pease (2018) stated that when men engage in care work, they habitually accentuate the organisational and practical facets of their role as they are under normative obligations to do so in a manner that does not contest their masculinity. Hellström and colleagues (2017) elaborated on how men attempt diverse approaches to try to comprehend whether their approaches are practical and beneficial. The men in their study defined informal care as a job and their approaches as logical and task oriented, many referring to their roles as managerial or organisational. This was beneficial for disconnecting emotional spousal bonds from task-oriented problem-solving, particularly when it came to corporeal-associated tasks. In addition to this, there were accounts of a 'take-charge' outlook that the men associated to their former occupations. However, the stereotypical notion that old men's unpaid care work styles are merely managerial and instrumental has been challenged. Indeed, research has also provided evidence documenting that albeit daunting, men actively assist their significant others with personal care when the need arises (Accius, 2017; Calasanti, 2006; Russell, 2007a).

## THE INVISIBILITY OF OLD MEN CARERS IN MALTA'S WELFARE POLICIES

The travails of Malta's welfare policy include two key documents. The Government launched the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing (Parliamentary Secretariat for Rights of Persons with Disability and Active Ageing, 2013) whose recommendations focused on volunteerism; digital competency, financial security; care to children, grandchildren, and old adults; civic and political participation; lifelong learning, and access to health care and rehabilitation services amongst other areas. Dementia policy development was strengthened in 2013 by the Government appointing a National Focal Point on Dementia who spearheaded the National Dementia Strategic Policy (Parliamentary Secretariat for Rights of Persons with Disability and Active Ageing, 2015). The latter outlines a number of endorsements spread over six key areas - namely, "an increase in awareness and understanding of dementia, timely diagnosis and the provision of care pathways, the availability of a trained workforce, improving dementia management and care in the community and long-term facilities, promoting an ethical approach to care and supporting medical and social research in the field" (Formosa, 2021b, p. 34).

A search for the texts 'man/men' and 'gender' in the two policy papers does not result in much results. On one hand, while the National Strategic Policy for Active Ageing made reference to men only in the sections on continuing

vocational education and training, age management, income security and poverty, and social exclusion and vulnerable groups, the National Dementia Strategic Policy only referred to such terms in the sections on dementia risks and protective factors, carers, and strategy delivery/implementation. In all instances, reference was made in a cursory and unimportant manner. This implies that, as is the case in international ageing policies (European Commission, 2021; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2021) old men continue to constitute an overlooked subgroup who are often misconstrued and passed over. As was argued two decades ago,

...the field of gerontology has accorded old men a second order of importance. This is evidenced by their minimal and oftentimes biased portrayal in gerontological literature, the lack of curricular offerings on men's lives in gerontological education, the inadequacy of attention to men's concerns in committee and organizational advocacy, the failure to launch recruitment efforts for male students in the field of gerontology, and insufficient attention to the needs of old men in gerontological practice. (Kosberg & Mangum, 2002, p.28)

Such oversight in Maltese ageing policy is problematic, especially in light of research reporting that old men carers have a poor awareness of available formal support, underutilise training, and experience negative financial, physical and mental health issues in their lives (Fee et al., 2020). For Thompson (1994), the motives why old men have been side-lined in ageing research and policy were due, in part, from the feminisation of ageing - that is, the fact that old men exist in smaller percentages and numbers than female peers. Thompson (1994) also suggested that the dissimilar masculinities among old men are typically disregarded, rendering old men a homogenised group when the truth is otherwise. Among other explanations for a failure to 'bring old men in' in social policy is that old men tend to be characterised by a better quality of life than women and more advantaged lives. Another reason is the successful stunts in advocacy on behalf of women's and feminist movements in calling attention to women's greater vulnerability and need for societal (and Professional) protection, as well as the fact that the large majority of gerontologists and ageing studies specialists are women. Although old women have been found to be, generally speaking, more exposed to jeopardy than old men as they report "higher rates of morbidity, disabling conditions, sense of anxiety and fear of old age, degree of discomfort with bodily appearance and function, and social exclusion, old men do not constitute a privileged gerontocracy" (Formosa, 2021a, p. 3). Indeed, old men tend to have less ingrained social networks than women, and hence, are at a greater peril of suffering social isolation and exclusion. Welfare systems rarely empathise with the needs of old men carers and rarely is any attention given to increasing (largely male) prison population, men experiencing domestic violence, or those engaging in self-destruction through substance abuse such as alcohol (Formosa et al. 2014). As Gilleard and Higgs (2020, p. 55) concluded, "the extent that to which society disadvantages women in working life may be reversed in retirement because men's gendered advantage derives much of its status and power from the relationship of work". This situation is exacerbated when countries' welfare systems enforce mandatory retirement. For instance, at the time of writing Maltese law permits employees to terminate their workers' employment contracts on the day of their 63rd birthday.

At this article's final version is being submitted (January 2023), The Ministry for Active Ageing (2023) launched the Malta second National Strategic Policy of Active Ageing for the years 2023-2030. Noting how whilst "older men tend to have less well-established social networks than women, and hence, are at a greater risk of experiencing social isolation and exclusion", and how "welfare systems rarely empathise with the needs of older men carers ... [and] older men experiencing domestic violence and ... substance abuse such as alcohol", this strategic policy advocates the following measure: "mitigate against the tendency for older men to experience difficulties in seeking help and talking about loneliness because of negative perceptions about emotional distress, and fears of stigma and embarrassment (Ministry for Active Ageing, 2023, p. 76-77). Although only time will tell, such sensitivity augurs well for the possible improvement of the quality of life and wellbeing of old men in Malta.

## CONCLUSION

An attention to gendering ageing does not solely mean attending solely women's ageing and old women, but is also to be concerned with men's ageing and old men, and their relationality in circles of intersectionality. This task may not be as straightforward as it seems since working with old men presents both contradictions and challenges. On one hand, as argued by Russell,

“Care work done by men remains an anomaly, an aberration of what is perceived as normative gender functioning in domestic settings. Examining care work in the lives of elderly men provides a perspective that disputes traditional tenets of gender role socialization and the ideology of separate spheres”. (Russell, 2007b, p.312)

On the other hand, for most old men carers the transition from their occupational activities in the market economy to the invisible world of care work and domestic responsibilities was a passage into struggle and strangeness (Russell, 2007b). This generates a great deal of uncertainty and identity displacement, or in more sociological terms, a feeling of anomie. Assisting old men carers overcome such a predicament involves ageing policy recognising that as carers, old men may not be well prepared for their unpaid care work responsibilities, and they are generally burdened, isolated, and lonely. At the same time, ageing policy is to make available affirmative action in community care services to more vulnerable sectors of old men carers experiencing physical and/or cognitive impairment, poverty, social exclusion, mental ill-health and a breakdown of relationships with adult children and grandchildren. Only so will a gendered sensitive ageing policy become a true possibility.

- 1 While various scholars and organisations advocate the use of the term 'older adult' on the basis that referring to someone as 'old' propagates stereotypes, this study follows the consensus in critical gerontology that research should champion the term 'old' and use in a positive and neutral way similar to the way other terms for other age groups are used (Calasanti, 2004). The key premise here is one should not fall in the trap of applying the word 'older' to imply that old persons are more acceptable if they are thought of in the same way as the middle-aged. Such an ontological position is also reflected in other branches of critical social science such in sexuality studies through the use of the term 'queer' (McCann & Monaghan, 2020) and in disability studies through the use of the term 'crip' (Berube & McRuer, 2006).

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# Phenomenology & intersectionality

Using PVEST in youth research for social justice

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## ABSTRACT

A concern with social justice values people's stories that tell us about human suffering and human wellbeing and which can lead us to solutions for change that we need to act on. Spencer's phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST, 1995) emerged as a critique of traditional developmental theories that tended to ignore multiple levels of inequality experienced by young people, and encapsulates systems theory, intersectionality and phenomenology. Dysfunctional ecological contexts can be studied by means of intersectionality's foregrounding of multifaceted structures and social locatedness, as it recognises how power dynamics and interwoven systems result in discriminatory outcomes within social constructs such as class, race, and gender. Focusing on phenomenological interpretations and responses, PVEST enhances these insights. Understanding the marginalisation of young people necessitates looking into their personal interpretation of what happens to and around them, how they cope with challenges that are often stemming from experiences of interwoven systems of

oppression. The resulting knowledge could better inform the design of services that speak to young people on the margins, support that they can find relevant and effective as they navigate society and the world more confidently and securely.

## KEYWORDS

Intersectionality, phenomenology, ecological systems theory, young people, marginalisation, PVEST

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of agency, albeit fundamental for understanding social action and change, remains ambiguous and disputable (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016; Hitlin & Elder, 2007; Fuchs, 2001; Loyal & Barnes, 2001), perhaps largely due to general assumptions that hold systems or structural factors to sway outcomes in human life (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016). In this paper I shall argue that intersecting personal factors resulting in multiple experiences of disadvantage by groups of young people need to be given due attention in discourses surrounding them. This is not to view them as powerless victims deserving of pity however. The concern here is to do justice to young people living within structures of disadvantage, in full acknowledgement and appreciation of their agency. This means that we depart from a stance that respects the capacity of young people to act on their environment as human beings, notwithstanding the impact of systems and structures on their lives.

## DEFICIT DISCOURSES

In empirical research and cultural depictions, young people are often seen through deterministic deficit and at-risk lenses, particularly if they come from marginalised groups. Such discourses deal with the risks and struggles that certain young people have to deal with, reductively holding systems of oppression as fuelling outcomes that society considers dysfunctional and anti-social (Hilliard et al., 2014).

One such system of oppression could be observed in the educational institution, which uses classificatory labels that serve the orderly running of the bureaucracy, but which may cause long-term harm to the students they refer to. The 'NEET' label, referring to young people who are disengaged from education, employment and training for a period of time that may be short, intermittent or extending over longer periods is one such label that is used in statistical analyses worldwide. A significant effect of this classification or label is that of perpetuating the exclusion and stigmatisation of the young people concerned (Brunila et al., 2020; Matos et al., 2019; Juberg & Skjefstad, 2019; Thompson, 2011; MacDonald, 2011), because it puts the blame on the young people concerned, and links them and their families to notions of deficit and dysfunction. This is a dynamic that allows no space for considering the socially constructed roots of their oppression, and helps consolidate a kind of moral panic, similar to those outlined in the work of Cohen (1973) that depict 'NEET' young people as parasites (Giret et al., 2020; Robson 2008; Young, 2007).

Several factors intersect in the formation of identity, some or all of which may serve to put the individuals concerned at a disadvantage to more privileged others in society, impacting their lived experiences of transitions into adulthood, and in the long term. To label and intervene upon them in educational settings as a 'problem' or as 'high risk', would impose further marginalising depictions on them, a process whereby their intersections are rendered invisible, and their coping responses and their worldview de-valued and obscured (Santos & VanDaalen, 2016).



## INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectional theory emerged from a history of feminist writers (Anzaldúa, 1987; hooks, 1981, 1984, 1989; Lorde, 1984; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) who articulated their experiences of pain, survival, and resistance as women of colour in their resistance to oppression and fight for social change. Intersectionality is thus a valuable lens to help sensitise us to the complexity of the human condition that renders futile one-dimensional perspectives of social phenomena.

The intersectional perspective acknowledges and addresses the exclusionary dynamics of power and domination at work in the lives of people living with disadvantage on various levels. To look at phenomena through an intersectional lens thus translates into being aware of their multi-dimensionality, and into appreciating the layered experiences of being human. This implicates personal biography and identity – combinations of personal qualities in one human being, such as those of ethnicity, gender, physical and mental health, and immigration status, for example (Kuran et al, 2020). Tierney (2019) explains that a conglomeration of such factors impinge on the degree to which an individual or a group of people may be considered vulnerable:

*"[...] people are not born vulnerable, they are made vulnerable. [...] different axes of inequality combine and interact to form systems of oppression – [...]" (2019, p. 127–128).*

This intersectional understanding of vulnerability helps shed light on the challenges implicated in targeted intervention when prevailing assumptions about people's lives are reductive and therefore misleading (Kuran et al., 2020).

These challenges are reflected in Acker (2006), for whom the elusivity of oppressive systems, together with intersectional invisibility make it difficult to conduct research from an intersectional approach. Such focused studies are necessary to erode oppressive regimes in action that are replicated and perpetrated via "interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations" (p. 443).

An intersectionality approach in studies about young people calls for researchers to observe how structures and norms shape the thoughts of young people and their views of the world. For example, a young lesbian woman living with a disability and coming from a deprived socio-economic background may go through social exclusion, bear the consequences of stereotypes, and encounter barriers that are created by her layered or multi-dimensional being in the world. All of this, in turn is contained in wider structures of power and privilege within society which also impact her lived experiences. Social classifications are formed within hierarchical and unequal social structures, while the different parts of oneself combine to form a distinctive experience of those same social powers and structures (Verez & Beale Spencer, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

When leaders and researchers acknowledge how deeply young people are affected by structures and norms, and how these impact their emotional state and their views of the world, then they can better understand their decisions as legitimate personal agency, even though this might conflict with the adult or sanctioned conception of what constitutes right and wrong. Personal agency relates to active seeking of and following what resonates with oneself: an "active process of choosing the appropriate institutional involvements, organisational memberships, and interpersonal relationships" (Shanahan 2000, p.675). Changes occurring in the young person's ecosystem, such as novel possibilities and/or unpredictable impediments or obstacles, shape and limit their prospects (Tomanović, 2019; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). Different contexts also define or facilitate particular agency at specific points during the young person's biography, such as being new to secondary school, after leaving school prematurely, or when experiencing unemployment. In such instances the shifting structures challenge young people to act accordingly, discovering their agency (Jeffrey, 2012; Tomanović, 2019).

In educational settings, young people's agency is acknowledged in so far as it satisfies the established official criteria (Fusco et al, 2013); they are expected to be 'entrepreneurs', and to know where they want to go with their life from within the pre-prepared moulds devised by the authorities, to forge a 'career', for example (Hodgson & Spours, 2020; Smyth et al., 2014). But there is where permission or expectancy to exercise agency stops. If they opt to reject what is on offer for any reason, leaving school early, and taking time out to consider what resonates with them, for example, they are promptly diagnosed as being 'at risk', among other labels foisted upon them (Stea et al., 2019; Liszka & Walawender, 2018; Andersson et al., 2018).

Intersectionality focuses on convergent systems, while the phenomenological lens afforded by PVEST zones in on the young person's upbringing and their own interpretation of all that they are experiencing in their lifeworld (Heidegger, 1988; Neubauer et al, 2019).

## PHENOMENOLOGY

The foundations of phenomenology were laid down by Edmund Husserl in 1900-01, and was later advanced by Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others. Phenomenological research is distinguished by the fact that it delves into the origins of phenomena, departing from people's lifeworld and focusing on the mundanity of everyday life (van Manen, 2016). People may have various lifeworlds, such as their home, their group of friends, the school or university, their place of work, the sport-centre, and so on. Each lifeworld has its own rules and rituals, and the young person's lived experience of each will vary accordingly. Phenomenological inquiry is aimed at investigating these lived experiences of participants' lifeworlds, and towards this end, phenomenological researchers adopt a non-judgemental, open stance to carefully make sense of the experiences of the research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The different human contexts – or lifeworlds - that characterise our lives are conceptualised as 'ecological systems' in the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979).

## ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

The ecological systems framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) positions the individual within a number of spheres of influence, and is predominantly applied to study the effect on people of the different contexts that they have to deal with or navigate in these spheres, as well as human behaviour in the different environments (Egan & Perry, 2001; Phinney, 1992). As may be said of all behaviourist theories, the ecological systems framework turns a blind eye to power dynamics and inequalities at the intersections of domains, ecosystems, and social positioning (Cole, 2009; Ghavami et al., 2016). The identity of a given young person could encapsulate the experiences of disadvantage, domestic abuse, being gender non-binary, and disability, for example. Statistical models may often include the effects of relationships, but may lack the insights afforded by the intersectional lens that seeks to do justice to effects of individual biographies and lived experience (Sanderson, 2020).

As they grow up, young people develop their own notion of life and living, and despite being a product of their family or ecosystem, within that same ecosystem there will be elements that resonate with the young person's imagination more than others, and this causes new meanings to infiltrate the mind, new desires that could catalyse a process of moving away from the environment of origin and related expectations (Bakketeig et al., 2020; Carabelli & Lyon, 2016). In such a scenario young people are seen as active subjects, capable of intentional action and self-expression (Coffey & Farrugia, 2014). I share the view of Tomanović (2018), for whom agency is the "capacity to act intentionally, emerging between structures and aspirations as the result of a process based on reflection, compromise, negotiation and resourcefulness" (p. 357).

Structures do not determine who we become or who we are for the simple reason that they are made by and feed from the world itself - a world which is continually in flux. Systems and structures are part of the world; they cannot be monolithic, but rather they are made up by a mosaic of what is existent in the world, and then there is the all - pervasive media which enable the explosion of colour and creation in the world to be accessed from our very fingertips. Because life is organic, we cannot help encountering all that is 'other' and relate to it. Humans have agency, maybe limited according to one's current access to resources, but agency nonetheless it is, and it develops over time (Kallinen & Häikiö, 2021; Dawson, 2012). Agency may be triggered by particularly sensitive instances or episodes (Thomson et al., 2002), which can involve family, or particular areas in personal life, such as issues related to health, education, work, emotional relationships, friendships, and so on (Tomanovic, 2018). As Davies (2010, p.67) succinctly puts it:

*“Agency ... lies in the capacity to critically examine thought, and to generate new thought, using not just intellect but also imagination and the senses. It is enabled, ... by a heightened capacity to listen to the other and to participate in and generate events with others that are capable of dismantling the inevitabilities of dominant, oppressive thoughts and practices.”*

The benefits of intersectionality, phenomenology, and ecological systems theory for youth research are combined in Spencer's phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), which I shall address in the following sections.

## SPENCER'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL VARIANT OF ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY (PVEST)

PVEST is a theory of human development that combines the intersectional theory and ecological systems theory by foregrounding the importance of people's own perceptions: “PVEST is an identity-focused cultural ecological perspective, which suggests significant and unavoidable plasticity” (Velez & Beale Spencer, 2018, p.79). It departs from the hypothesis that vulnerability is part of the human condition and posits that temporal and context-specific processes of identity formation are constantly interrelating with the structures and systems implicated in one's lifeworld. Identity unfolds throughout the life trajectory, but is of particular sensitivity in adolescence, with the accelerated physical, sexual, emotional and intellectual developmental changes and the confusion that these cause, including self-consciousness and angst. The life course focus of PVEST can contribute valuable insights into changes occurring during the life course both within Bronfenbrenner's enclosed spaces and between them, thus emphasising the person's meaning-making accompanying identity development, reactions and outcomes (Spencer, 1995, 2006, 2008).

PVEST holds that far from being pre-determined by structures, people's lives are lived and navigated through by means of coping mechanisms implicating structures as well as personal interpretations and response. PVEST has been applied to research in systems of inequality faced by marginalised youth, such as racial minority children (Hope & Beale Spencer, 2017), same-sex attracted (SSA) students (Ullman, 2014), and African-American youth (Lee, Spencer & Harpalani, 2003).

The PVEST framework can be used to explore and investigate what it means to be a teenager dropping out of school early, and/or becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training), for example. It can help us understand how and why implacable realities can combine to push people one way or another, and shed light on young people's agency and resistance, as well as their lived experiences of personal hardship, adversity, and disadvantage.

## COMBINED BENEFITS OF PVEST AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Hegemonies related to ethnicity, sexualities and socio-economic status are associated with inequality of resource distribution, as in access to support services that can make a crucial difference to how young people cope in both everyday life and challenging situations. Coping processes include how the young person acts within their unique social position, which in turn is impacted by insidious dominant forces of oppression that are rooted in history (Velez & Beale Spencer, 2018). For this reason a phenomenological approach complements the benefits of intersectional theory in studying identity, because it sheds light onto the ways by which young people make meaning and relate to the myriad environments they find themselves in, both within society, and in the world.

## CONCLUSION

Intersectionality highlights the complexity and power in structures within which young people live. It does this by focusing on the genesis of power and its impacts on the lifeworld of young people. PVEST can use intersectionality and simultaneously become enhanced by it, because it facilitates a more nuanced understanding of marginality (or marginalities) experienced by the young person navigating the world.

A qualitative focus in youth research is particularly helpful because young people are going through adolescence - a particularly delicate and confusing period of personal growth, implicating conflicting feelings about relationships to self and others, society, life, their identity/ies, among other factors (Erikson, 1968; Syed & Azmitia, 2009). Support must be attentive to young people in such a way as to recognise their complexity and agency, rather than view them according to a deficit model, as helpless but 'guilty' victims of the structures that they are caught up in. The ideal of social justice compels us to strive for change, which can be better implemented if and when we understand better the nature of intersecting sources of discrimination and disadvantage. This emphasizes the necessity of schools, communities, families, and other social actors surrounding young people to become sensitised to the intricacies and insidiousness of different forms of marginalization affecting them, as well as to their lived experiences of these environments.

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# Childhood intersections

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## ABSTRACT

Intersectionality is a term used by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to explain that black women cannot be represented fully through feminist and antiracist discourse. The term has since been used to show that every person has a multitude of identity facets which interact with each other. Children have been considered as a homogenous group for many decades, yet they need to be considered in light of their race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age and ethnic background. Education is the key to giving every child equitable opportunities to help in their development, leading them to become more agentic in things which affect them directly.

## KEY WORDS

Intersectionality, childhood, activism

## INTRODUCTION

In her article, *'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,'* Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) explores how the experiences of black women are not fully represented by discourses of feminism and antiracism, when each category is analysed separately. Feminists in the 1970s felt that mainstream feminism represented white middle-class women and anti-racism represented black men (Crenshaw, 1991). The need for an intersectionality theory had already been felt back in 1851, in Sojourner Truth's speech delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, *'Ain't I a Woman'*. Crenshaw (1991) mentions the DeGraffenreid v. General Motors 1976 case, in which Emma DeGaffenreid sued General Motors for not hiring her on both gender and racial discrimination grounds. Although the judge ruling the case dismissed it, stating that there were no grounds for such allegations, DeGraffenreid stated that GM only hired women who were white and black people who were men. Crenshaw (1991) coined the word 'intersectionality' to represent those people who are experiencing multiple marginalisations and whose experiences are not represented fully by any particular socially constructed identity (Taefi, 2011). The metaphor of the crossroads (Crenshaw, 1991) is used to conceptualise that we need to see how the different identities interact to create feelings of marginalisation within disadvantaged groups. Alanen (2016) states that through these identities, women form part of different frameworks which can lead to both privilege and oppression.

Alper et al. (2016) and Rodó-de-Zarate (2016) note that intersectionality is the understanding of different connections between race, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age and ethnicity. These are different dimensions of identity which may cause marginalisation and discrimination. Intersectionality is now a term which is used to represent groups who experience multiple oppressions (Williams-Butler et al., 2021) and many scholars have turned their attention towards exploring how it can be applied to childhood (Rodó-de-Zarate, 2016).

## CHILDHOOD – COMMONALITIES AND DIVERSITIES

Childhood is commonly defined by age, but it should not suggest homogeneity in the effects of social contexts faced by children in their everyday experiences (Christensen & James, 2008). Commonality and diversity should be characteristics of childhood to be considered as assets for any group that the children might associate with. The particular social context in which one is born, should not be the defining factor of what the future holds for that child (Calder, 2006). Education should be the tool which helps children determine their own future.

Although education is always high priority on the political agenda, it is a global phenomenon (Meadow, 2015) that the educational system should, but does not, give access to equitable opportunities for all children. Education is a tool to provide equity to counter racial discrimination and oppression and it does not suffice to treat every child equally. I.M. Young (1990) states that unequal educational attainment and unequal opportunities will persevere in today's multicultural societies, even if all students have access to education. Giving equal access to education to children will not address all the kinds of injustice that have an effect on students from disadvantaged groups. In *'Crisis in Education'* Arendt (1958) states that teachers need to take responsibility for children and that education should be a safe space for children to transition into adulthood and into the political sphere.

During the 70s and 80s, children were depicted as 'unagentic, blank slates' (Martin, 2005, p. 45). Recent literature on childhood has been considering children as having the ability and the right to become more active (De Graeve, 2015), especially in matters which directly affect them. This shift in perception on childhood can be further developed if childhood is seen in relation to the intersectionalities which affect this stage in life, as discussed in the next section.



## CHILDHOOD AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Although intersectionality originated as a feminist term, it has recently been applied to different disadvantaged groups, including children (Taefi, 2011). De Graeve (2015) states that the notion of age needs to be considered in relation to other factors which make up the child's identity. The author quotes Prout and James (1997) who say that childhood needs to be analysed in relation to other categories such as gender, class and ethnicity. Alanen (2016) asserts that in order to effectively understand children's complex social identities we need to explore childhood in relation to gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, ethnic origins, race, class and age. Alper et al. (2016) state that intersectionality is a useful tool for studying childhood identities, as a young person can be advantaged for making part of one social group and discriminated against for having other characteristics. For example a child can be admitted to a school for high attainment children, while still feeling 'othered' (Jensen, 2011) by classmates due to the family economic status. Alper et al. (2016) state that intersectionality is important to understand the diversity among children and to find the commonalities which will build a common future (p. 110). Rodó-de-Zarate (2016) states that intersectionality allows research to consider who else children are. Intersectionality gives relevance to children's social differences as affecting their everyday experiences (Rodó-de-Zarate, 2016). To give a visual perspective of how intersectionalities interact with each other, Rodó-de-Zarate (2016) created a tool - Relief Maps. These maps are built on three dimensions: the geographical, the social and the psychological. Relief Maps provide an image, drawn by the researcher, to give a visual representation of the oppression and privilege experienced, due to one's multiple identities. Williams-Butler et al. (2021) use intersectionality to investigate the language used in the American child welfare system which is discriminatory against Black children from low-income families.

Taefi (2011) states that one of the disadvantages in childhood studies is that children are taken to be gender-neutral. Childhood experiences are generally taken as being at par for both girls and boys, making the gender-specific disadvantages less visible (Renold, 2005). Crenshaw (1991) states that we cannot solve a problem if we cannot see the problem. Taefi (2011) points to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 2 which states that every child's rights will be protected regardless of their gender, while further on in the document, Article 38 mentions issues which only affect boys, such as military service. Issues which affect girls specifically, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation are not referred to in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In 2017, UNICEF launched the 'Girls for Girls' initiative to empower girls through education, specifically focusing on girls in Nigeria, which has the highest rate of girls who do not attend school; this initiative aims at teaching girls so that they have better chances for their future. Although there have been advancements in gender identity in recent years, literature is still lacking regarding childhood and gender.

## GIRL-CHILD INTERSECTIONALITIES

It is important to dedicate this section specifically to girl children because they are at intersections between being discriminated against for being young and for being female (De Graeve, 2015). Many childhood scholars treat childhood as a homogenous group (De Graeve, 2015; Christensen & James, 2008; Davis, 2008), yet it is important to recognise that gender plays an important role in the kind of experiences children go through (Taefi, 2011). As noted by Taefi (2011), the first question one asks when a child is born, is whether it is a boy or a girl. The child's sex determines how they will be welcomed and treated by different cultures (Taefi, 2011). For example, a common practice in the Volta Region in northern Ghana is Trokosi, whereby girls are offered to a priest to work in sexual servitude to make good for the sins of their family members (Taefi, 2011). Several Islamic countries have reservations against Article 2 in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), specifying that states need to modify existing laws which discriminate against women, as it conflicts against the Shari'a law (Taefi, 2011).

Girls are born into a world where boy's choices dictate the norm while girl choices are given less value or ignored (Taefi, 2011). Even in cultures where there is 'equality' between the sexes, girls and women are still held back and discouraged in certain situations which are still dominated by men (Dresden, 2016). Taefi (2011) considers girls to be marginalised as children for being girls, and as females for being young. These intersectionalities hinder girls' experiences from being recognised and validated. Taefi (2011) suggests that women's rights and children's rights discourses need to work together to better represent girls' rights in both categories. Apart from age and gender, Taefi (2011) also mentions other forms of discrimination experienced particularly by girls such as homophobia, racism, colonization and poverty (p. 345).

A study by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) revealed that the fact that girls' rights are at intersections between children's rights and women's rights will continue to make girls' marginalisation possible (De Graeve, 2015; Taefi, 2011). De Graeve (2015) notes how women and children patriarchal discourses relegate both groups to the private sphere.

At the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the issues of the girl-child were discussed. A declaration known as the Beijing Declaration (1995) ensued, becoming one of the first documents to address girls' rights specifically. Some of the objectives include eliminating negative cultural practices against girls and the promotion of girls' rights. To date, many girls around the world are still suffering discrimination and marginalisation due to their gender and age (De Graeve, 2015).

Taefi (2011) suggests that a way forward would be the appointment of a Special Rapporteur for the Girl-Child needs in order to promote and advocate for girls' inclusion in international human rights law. This rapporteur will suggest reforms in existing policies and ensure that the Beijing Declaration (1995) is factualised.

## CONCLUSION

Taefi (2011) states that Intersectionality theory is useful for shedding light on girls' positioning in international law. Girls are marginalised both for their gender and their age amongst other facets of their identities. An intersectional analysis takes into account that every form of discrimination or marginalisation does not take place in a vacuum, but in relation to other forms of discrimination. Intersectionality theory helps to make these discriminations visible, so that we can then address them (Crenshaw, 1991).

The Intersectionality Theory has to be applied to the educational system in order to make visible the roots of policies and practices which keep perpetuating the idea of children as homogenous, vulnerable and un-agentic (Wyness et al., 2004). Education needs to go through a great shift in vision to give children an agentic role by teaching them skills to become politically active in things which affect them.

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# Excluded

A trauma-informed approach to understanding offender criminogenic needs and prospects of rehabilitation

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## ABSTRACT

When discussing offending behaviour, much of the mainstream discourse observed in the media, most notably on social media, seems to centre on the need for more punitive measures- the longer, the more retributory, the better. Malta is already fairly reliant on incarceration. The CrimeMalta Observatory (Formosa, 2020) reported that by the end of 2020, Malta's prison, Corradino Services Agency (formerly known as Corradino Correctional Facility) housed almost 900 inmates (Eurostat, 2012). In fact, over a ten-year span, the Corradino Services Agency has almost doubled its prison population (45%) - a prison structure that was originally designed and built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Georgiev, 2016, Scicluna, 2004). On the other hand, the underlying causes of offending are often ignored. Furthermore, many offenders will report having experienced trauma and adversity, with many of these experiences dating back to childhood (Baglivio & Epps, 2016). The broader implications of this on an interpersonal basis, but

also in relation to community-based factors, as a whole need to be considered, as many of these can easily lead to social exclusion. This paper shall discuss the relationship between trauma and offending, through a Risk-Need-Responsivity perspective (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The implications of taking a trauma-informed perspective in the rehabilitation of offenders shall be discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Offenders, criminogenic need, risk factor, rehabilitation, trauma-informed practice

## INTERSECTIONALITY AND OFFENDERS

The term “Intersectionality” was coined by Crenshaw (1989) to relay how inequality comes in various forms. These varying forms of inequality often operate in tandem and have a cumulative effect. She emphasised that race is recognised as a form of inequality, but this is usually considered separately from aspects such as gender, class, or ethnicity. The point made by Crenshaw (1989) is that inequality is a multidimensional and complex issue, that when seen by an “otherwise-privileged group” creates a “distorted analysis” (p.140). This suggests that it is sometimes difficult to understand the impact of any form of inequality as an “outsider” which may be due to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon being considered.

Similarly, Sampson and Laub (1997) maintained that a criminal career may develop due to a cumulative disadvantage, which is an accumulation of negative consequences brought on by life events that occur across the lifespan (Sampson & Laub, 1997). They later expanded on this concept with their Age-graded Theory of Social Control (Sampson & Laub, 2005). They claimed that social conformity is mediated by social control institutions, suggesting that the weaker the bonds to society the more likely an individual is to resort to crime. Society's reaction to this behaviour may also have both a direct and indirect causal effect on the continuity of offending behaviour (Sampson & Laub, 2005). Social exclusion may thus facilitate the individual's transition into crime. This is compounded by the weakening of social bonds and the cumulative disadvantage that may also be brought on by social inequality. This may be considered diametrically opposite to the concept of rehabilitation.

Although there appears to be some disagreement over how to define rehabilitation (Wade & de Jong, 2000), many acknowledge that assisting offenders to become equipped with both internal resources such as values, skills, or knowledge and external resources such as support systems, employment or prosocial relationships may increase their potential to become contributing members of society (Ward & Maruna, 2007).

The widely recognised Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR; Andrews & Bonta, 2010) model, for example, takes a “risk management” approach to offender rehabilitation, by focusing on evaluating the risk an offender poses to society and then aiming to reduce this risk, with the least expenditure possible (Ward & Maruna, 2007).

The core principles of this model are risk, need, and responsivity (Andrews & Bonta, 2010, Andrews et al., 1990). Risk may be predicted through several factors, which may essentially be used to predict future offending (Polaschek, 2012). Determining the level of risk presented by an offender may also be used to determine the “dosage” needed for intervention (Polaschek, 2012). The need principle relates to the targets for change and so when adequately addressed is likely to decrease recidivism (Andrews, Bonta & Hoge, 1990). These were later classified as eight major risk/need factors: “The Big Four” and “The Moderate Four” (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). “The Big Four” include having a history of antisocial behaviour, antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognition and antisocial associates (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The “Moderate Four” consists of family/marital circumstances, school/work, leisure/recreation, and substance abuse (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The third principle, responsivity, focuses on responding

to these needs through appropriate treatment. The intervention would therefore need to be reflective of the offender's personality, learning style and dependent on the offender's level of motivation (Jung & Dowker, 2016).

The model is based on the premise that guiding offenders toward recognising that a life away from crime benefits them as well as the community (Polaschek, 2012). The model also attempts to target change by addressing offending behaviour in a "compassionate, collaborative, and dignified" manner (Polaschek, 2012, p.3). This suggests that decreasing the risk of re-offending presented by the offender can be achieved by increasing their engagement with the community rather than excluding them from it.

## CONCEPTUALISING TRAUMA

The impact of trauma on forensic populations is increasingly being recognised, given that the effect can be wide-ranging and may have a significant long-term impact. The theoretical underpinnings of offending behaviour have been widely researched (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) yet few studies have focused exclusively on trauma in relation to offenders.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V; American Psychiatric Association, 2013) defines trauma as "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence" (p. 271), as part of a newly introduced diagnostic category "Trauma and Stressor-related Disorders" which groups together disorders relating to adverse events. Yet, this conceptualisation of trauma has been criticised for being limited, particularly in attempting to identify the roots and triggers of recurrent abuse as well as acknowledging the experience of systematic oppression (Burstow, 2003, Jewkes, et al., 2019).

Burstow (2003) argued that "Trauma is not a disorder but a reaction to a kind of wound. It is a reaction to profoundly injurious events and situations in the real world and, indeed, to a world in which people are routinely wounded" (p.1302). It is something that can elicit a "concrete physical, cognitive, affective, and spiritual response by individuals and communities to events and situations that are objectively traumatizing (Burstow, 2003, p.1304).

Trauma may impact people in different ways. Transgenerational trauma, for example, is used to describe trauma that can be passed on from one generation to another (DeAngelis, 2019). This can have significant implications when considering the impact this may have on the children of inmates, who could have in a sense, vicariously experienced trauma despite not having directly been subject to the traumatic event (see Duran & Duran, 1998). Trauma may also affect communities, meaning that persons forming specific groups such as a shared community or social group, may also experience trauma as a collective unit (Danieli, 1998). Recent research has discussed community trauma as a symptom of social inequality (Pinderhughes, et al., 2015). Aspects such as disorganised neighbourhoods, inappropriate housing, or even high-crime environments may all contribute to compounding the experience of trauma.

Despite these various conceptualisations of trauma, it is clear that trauma can refer to both the individual experience but also the collective one, which may relate to single or even recurrent events. An example of this would be the experience of being systematically abused as a child. Female offenders, in particular, are more likely than their male counterparts, to have a history of physical and psychological issues, including sexual abuse, mental health issues, and substance misuse (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013, Prison Reform Trust, 2017). Trauma, in relation to offenders, could be considered to commence prior to an individual becoming engaged in crime, but further amplified once an offender becomes involved in the criminal justice system (i.e. contact with the police, Court, incarceration and/or involvement in community-based sanctions).

## ESTABLISHING A LINK BETWEEN TRAUMA AND OFFENDING

The current milieu in the rehabilitation of offenders has focused on identifying the central criminogenic needs proposed by Andrews and Bonta (2010) to predict the risk of re-offending, but how are these related to trauma? Whereas up until a few years ago trauma was usually discussed in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (which is largely dependent on one's response to a particular event), today the emphasis is shifting onto the broader range of difficulties related to experiencing a traumatic event or a series of traumatic events. Contemporary research has been looking more closely at the impact of being exposed to trauma during childhood. Trauma experienced by children who are still developing could have a lifelong impact (Lewis, et al., 2021). According to Lewis et al. (2021) traumatic experiences occur as a result of numerous interpersonal threats that may transpire early on in a person's life, which may lead to severe mental health issues and cognitive impairment. Exposure to complex trauma as well as co-occurring issues may further increase this predisposition to developing issues.

The impact of developmental trauma can be observed in a child's formative years and may have a lifelong effect. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1951) has long established the need for a child to form a secure attachment with a caregiver. An absence of a secure bond is likely to have an impact on the child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. This is often observed in sexual offenders. For example, Marshall and Barbaree's (1990) Integrated Theory of Sexual Offending discusses the role of early attachment and future problematic behaviour in managing negative states, establishing intimacy, and feeling empathy. Paedophiles, in particular, are more likely to have preoccupied attachment styles due to their inability to form relationships with adults (Ward et al., 1996).

Attachment issues could also be related to parenting style, which is also another aspect that increases the risk of re-offending, particularly with the lack of proper supervision, harsh, authoritarian discipline, and parental conflict (see Baumrind, 1968; Farrington, et al., 2003). For example, being exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) has a significant and lasting impact on the well-being of children, as children may be exposed to trauma both on a physical and a psychological level. A meta-analysis by Vu et al. (2016) concluded that children who were exposed to IPV were more likely to externalize their problems through aggression resulting in issues related to academic performance, peer relations, and future risk for violence when in an intimate relationship. Additionally, Jones (2010) maintained that traumatic experiences can lead to repeated behaviours where the re-enactment (i.e. sequences of behaviours that are repeated across different contexts) may also become a reversal of roles- with the victim becoming the offender. The offender may engage in this behaviour as a way of coping with the trauma experienced.

Adverse childhood experience (ACEs) is a term used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and another form of traumatic experiences for persons that fall under the age of 18 (Su & Stone, 2020). Trauma can take many forms, sexual, emotional, or may involve neglect. Victims of ACEs may report various issues; somatic, emotional dysregulation, interpersonal issues, avoidance, dissociation, issues with memory and shame (Su & Stone, 2020). The prevalence of ACEs in offenders is reportedly higher, particularly when examined through a cumulative perspective (see Baglivio & Epps, 2016). Childhood variables, such as difficulties with socio-emotive processing (such as being empathic), struggling with familial issues (IPV), having experienced parental rejection, a harsh parenting style, or even poor parental supervision, are likely to be associated with poor conduct (Owens & Shaw, 2003). As the young person starts to interact with persons outside of the home, his perspective of the world may start to shift and gravitate toward seeking a similar group of peers (Hyde, et al., 2010).

Antisocial behaviour is often described in relation to Moral Disengagement, which is a term initially proposed by Bandura, et al. (1996) to explain how individuals justify immoral behaviours and ultimately engage in antisocial behaviour. Hyde et al. (2010) found a link between Moral Disengagement in later years with early parental rejection, impoverished neighbourhoods, and low empathy. Their research indicated that childhood adversity could be a strong predictor of criminogenic behaviour. Children exposed to maltreatment, so neglect and abuse, are also



more likely to report issues related to social competence (Miller-Graff, et al., 2017). Neglect, in particular, is also likely to have an impact on cognitive ability and mental health in adulthood (Pereira, et al., 2017).

Recent research has focused on establishing a link between trauma and psychopathy, and the externalisation of behaviours resulting in juvenile delinquency, conduct disorder, the severity of offending, and aggression (DeLisi, et al., 2021). Traumatic events were found to increase the propensity for the formation of a psychopathic (dys) functional personality as well as aggression, delinquency, and violence (DeLisi, et al., 2021). This could be due to the offenders' need to adapt to the circumstances they found themselves in, particularly in severe circumstances whereby they either respond by externalising their reaction to trauma through antisocial behaviours or internalise their response, resulting in anxiety, depression, and stress (DeLisi, et al., 2021). Children exposed to trauma and adversity are therefore more likely to develop maladaptive coping skills to deal with the circumstances they find themselves in, disengaging from society whilst ultimately being excluded from it due to their antisocial behaviour.

Incarceration can also serve to trigger pre-existing traumas. The isolation from society, deprivation of liberty, the built environment (the austere architecture and structure of the building, bars on windows, and prison cells) are all designed to have both a physical and psychological response, that act as a deterrent to crime. Yet, aspects such as overcrowding, mental health issues, access to illicit substances, and limited resources, are likely to exacerbate any pre-existing psychological issues. This is likely to be worsened should inmates also have been exposed to trauma as particular triggers may lead to further traumatisation and re-victimisation (Bateman, et al., 2013). Consideration of data presented by Tabone and Sammut Henwood (2021) during the RISE Public Conference: 5 Years of Rehabilitation and Reintegration revealed that residents within the programme reported having a history of abuse in the family (53%), being a victim of abuse/neglect (40%), originating from a criminogenic family (32.5%); with incarcerated parents (10%) and siblings (15%). Over half of the inmates also disclosed having come from a broken home (53%), with 32% having a large family. They also reported that they had children with multiple partners (23%). Almost 73% had a diverse criminal history, and long-term unemployment (65%), with half of the sample reporting that they had financial difficulties and issues related to housing, and in some cases, homelessness (53%). A quarter of the cohort reported having experienced mental health difficulties and almost the same number of participants reported having a history of alcohol abuse (28%). Given that rehabilitative efforts are designed to address criminogenic needs as a means to reduce the level of risk presented by the offender, the prison environment is not likely to facilitate the rehabilitative process and is even less likely to encourage social inclusion (Woolham, 2003) once inmates return to the community.

## CONCLUSION

Although most survivors of childhood adversity do not go on to commit serious offences, the pathways between trauma and offending behaviour, are multiple and complex. Yet, childhood maltreatment may have a significant impact on a child's development, which links to a broader set of issues, such as poor attachment and cognitive attainment, attitudinal issues, as well as social and mental health disorders. The process of rehabilitation is not solely dependent on the offender but also on the structures that act as the mechanism that drives the process. As previously discussed, rehabilitation should serve to guide offenders towards developing the internal resources and external resources to achieve their goals in a prosocial manner (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Rehabilitative efforts aimed at reducing exposure to trauma may not only serve to protect vulnerable children but may also limit the possibility of offenders disengaging from society and resorting to crime. A trauma-informed approach towards rehabilitation could have numerous benefits; it could serve to reduce recidivism rates, address the excessive use of incarceration whilst increasing reliance on community-based sanctions, further inclusivity, and shifting towards trauma-sensitive services and establishments.

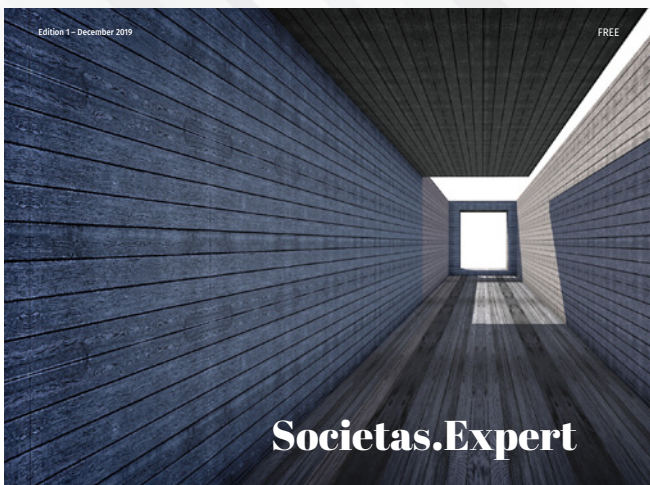
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