



EAEA BACKGROUND PAPER

ADULT LEARNING AND GENDER

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The European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA) is the voice of non-formal adult education in Europe. EAEA is a European NGO with more than 130 member organisations in 43 countries and represents more than 60 million learners Europe-wide. EAEA promotes adult learning and access to and participation in non-formal adult education for all; particularly for groups that are currently underrepresented.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Gender – as a social construct – is closely linked to (the creation of) identity, to social expectations and role assignments, and the extent to which these are “performed”¹ and questioned. A large number of papers and essays have been written on the connection between power relations and education, and specifically about the reproduction of power relations through education. Gender is a category that cannot be grasped without a debate on power relations: it goes to the core of social (unequal) relations and how these relations are produced and reproduced.

Gender sensitivity in adult learning and education (ALE) is about more than trying to improve targeted outreach programmes for men and women who seem to be slipping through the gaps. By providing gender sensitive education opportunities, people are not only more likely to engage but also more likely to get the most out of their experiences. This background paper explores the problems that gender sensitive adult education could attempt to solve, good practices and examples to help make current structures more gender sensitive, and the wider benefits of gender sensitivity in ALE.

According to a number of studies², women participate in adult education in Europe, especially informal provisions, at a higher rate than men. Thus, if outreach is so successful for women, why is gender sensitivity important? Male-targeted outreach, especially for leisure education, is

still lacking, and women with a migrant background are still struggling against a double disadvantage that is not being appropriately recognised on a widespread level within the sector. Furthermore, while women are more likely to participate in non-formal learning, there are still major gaps in knowledge and understanding on various topics: like finances, and politics, and without making these areas of learning more accessible for women, gaps in attainment will not be closed.

AONTAS, Ireland's National Adult Learning Organisation and a member of EAEA, have released a research report on the learning styles, preferences, barriers and feelings surrounding adult education by gender. It demonstrates that not only are men and women motivated to learn - or demotivated to learn - very differently, but also they have different in-classroom preferences. The men involved in the study were more averse to mixed gender learning spaces than women, nevertheless, tutors noted that this aversion was true of many students (men and women)³. This was seen not only in the learners' testimonies but also in tutors witnessing the way that men and women self-segregate and choose to socialise completely separately.

Many men, especially older men, see leisure adult education as ‘feminine’, which only exacerbates their fear that adult education is embarrassing, emasculating, or somehow admitting ignorance. Male-only learning spaces and provision could help to

¹ A well-known quotation by the philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir is: "One is not born a woman, one becomes one."

² See, for instance, Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak & Maciej Lis. 2013. *Does Gender matter for Lifelong*

Learning Activity? Neujobs Working Paper No. D16.2A. /

Angela Venh. 2007. *Gender-Kontraste: Das Lernen von Frauen und Männern*. DIE, Bonn.

³ Peadar King, Sheila O'Driscoll & Stephanie Holden. 2002. *Gender and Learning*. AONTAS, Dublin.

combat the belief that informal education is for women and encourage increase participation amongst the low-skilled male community.

As men are generally more likely to participate in adult learning for professional and economic reasons, their participation rates in in-service training programmes, employment-oriented provision or learning with prospects for career advancement are better than in leisure time learning. A lot of outreach to male learners, therefore, focuses on leisure education.

The Men's Sheds Movement (sometimes community sheds), controlled by national associations, appear all over Europe, as well as Australia, Asia and the USA, and provide craftwork and social interaction in a casual environment without obligation⁴. It is an example of the theory of 'third place'⁵: a place for community learning or socialisation separate from work and home.

By emphasising and exploring the importance of place in the movement, it contributes to the identity of the "shedders" and could also help learners to separate assumptions about femininity and learning.

Differences in total working hours for men and women in Europe could provide an

explanation to the disparity in participation by gender. While men spend more minutes per day in paid work, women spend more hours per day in total work: working hours are naturally a barrier to adult education participation for men and women in employment. The lower levels of participation amongst men are often contributed to their higher working hours (considering paid hours only). This could be a result of paid hours being stricter, less flexible, and harder to share amongst friends and family members. However, the AONTAS study found that men were more likely to have family support than women⁶. If women are dependent on their families to cover some of their unpaid responsibilities in order to make time for learning, but not receiving that support, the difference in participation seems less likely to be related to working hours.

This background paper takes various subtopics or examples of gender sensitivity in adult education and analyses them as individual areas, making its content easier to navigate according to the reader's interests or concerns.

⁴ Golding, Barry. 2016. *Critical Reflections on the Role of the Men's Shed Movement in Changing Perceptions about Learning by Older Men in Community Settings*. Contemporary Issues and Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education. Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy (University of Belgrade), European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA) and Adult Education Society, Belgrade.

⁵ Edward Soja (1996) proposes a different way of thinking about space and spatiality. First and second

spaces are two different, and possibly conflicting, spatial groupings where people interact physically and socially: such as home (everyday knowledge) and school (academic knowledge). Third spaces are the in-between, or hybrid, spaces, where the first and second spaces work together to generate a new third space. (Oxford Reference)

⁶ King, Peadar/O'Driscoll, Sheila/Holden, Stephanie. 2002. *Gender and Learning*. AONTAS, Dublin.

2 REPRESENTATION OF MEN IN ADULT LEARNING

While the issue of gender can lead many of us to envisage women's rights and raising levels of women's participation, men, especially older men, continue to find themselves underrepresented in non-formal learning in Europe. This could be linked to a number of factors: for example, that men in Europe are working more paid hours than their female counterparts, and thus do not have the time or flexibility to bring learning into their schedule. However, this is unlikely to be directly connected, as while women on average are working fewer paid hours a week, their total work (both paid and unpaid duties) is higher than men's. It is unclear whether this means that unpaid work is more flexible, or that there are more programmes in place to support individuals with unpaid responsibilities (the provision of free or low-cost childcare to adult learners, for example).



Source: Irish Mens Sheds Organisation

An AONTAS study on how gender relates to adult education⁷ found that often men were more wary of adult education when not focused directly towards employment or economic opportunities because of perceived 'femininity' of learning for leisure. Retired men, no longer motivated by professional development, are the most unlikely of any group to participate in non-formal education (when controlled for all factors other than professional situation and gender). This would indicate that one of the factors behind men's low participation is their need for economic motivation.

The Gender and Learning study also found that men's associations with adult learning were much more negative than women's: they were more embarrassed to participate, more fearful, and less inclined to actively include themselves in the learning process. This was exacerbated by a fear of mixed gender classrooms (something that was not highlighted by women from the study). This dislike of mixed classrooms could also stem from men's dislike of engaging with the social aspects of adult learning, unlike women: working in a mixed gender environment could lead to more pressure to socialise and share personal experiences.

Another explanatory approach looks at the supply side of adult learning⁸: since non-formal education opportunities for men,

⁷ King, Peadar. O'Driscoll, Sheila. Holden, Stephanie. 2002. *Gender and Learning*. Commissioned by AONTAS on behalf of the Dept. of Education and Science.

⁸ Golding, Barry. 2014. *Older Men's Learning and Conviviality*. In: Bernhard Schmidt Hertha, Sabina

Jelenc Krašovec, Marvin Formosa (eds.). *Learning across Generations in Europe. Contemporary Issues in Older Adult Education*. Sense Publishers. Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei. p. 23-34

especially older men, are only available to a limited extent, men are also more likely to participate in education opportunities geared to the labour market. Furthermore, concepts of masculinity play an important role in addressing the lower participation of men in education. Non-formal education is sometimes perceived as patronising and therefore less effective. Golding et al. (2014: 256) conclude that “the most effective learning for most men with limited prior learning is informal, local and community-based, which builds on what men know, can do and are interested in.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Low pressure environments
- Availability of single gender environments
- “Third space learning”, outside of the home

BEST PRACTICE:

Men’s Sheds/Community Sheds. A global/international non-formal learning project/programme. See, for instance, the Irish Men’s Sheds Organisation: <https://menssheds.ie/>

3 GENDERED HEALTH EDUCATION

The need for gender sensitivity or a gendered approach to much of adult health education is obvious. This is especially true when considering sex education, and pregnancy education (obstetric education), two topics with sex differences at the centre.

This subtopic has been split into three areas: sex education for adults, obstetric education, and education for victims of sex-based violence.

3.1 Sex education

3.1.1 Menstrual education

Menstruation education for young women and girls in remote areas in the world, such as rural India⁹, is becoming more accessible and more widely recognised and supported by education advocates. Education through the parents plays a central role in menstruation education. It is, therefore, particularly important to make that knowledge and learning available to women

who have left school and those who are mothers themselves, rather than waiting for the next generation of girls to grow old enough to be mothers themselves. If this happens, the shift towards menstruation equality worldwide becomes a much nearer and more realistic goal. Another crucial element is to channel discourse away from just the physical impact on menstruation and also engaging with the psychosocial impact, which is still not available to many menstruating women and girls worldwide.

RECOMMENDATION:

- Encourage widespread learning and conversation surrounding menstruation and its psychosocial impact, if possible, occurring between generations as well as in mainstream schooling and non-formal learning environments

⁹ Geertz, Alexandra/ Iyer, Lakshmi/ Kasen, Perri/ Mazzola, Francesca/ Peterson, Kyle. 2016. *Menstrual*

3.1.2 For disabled people

For many disabled women in Europe education and information regarding their sexuality and sexual rights do not focus so much on consent as they do on the necessity of contraception (or even protection from and avoidance of sexual contacts). However, a survey by the Open University which discussed contraception directly with a number of women with intellectual disabilities found that many of them, while not directly coerced into the use of a contraceptive, were provided with one without any real understanding of the procedure they were undergoing, nor the purpose of the contraceptive in the first place¹⁰.

Education about contraception – what it is and how different methods are used - in an understandable and accessible way is vital in order to empower women to make their own choices over their reproduction and sexuality, including in cases where women's bodies would not be able to support pregnancy or childbirth, or where women would not be able to raise their children in the event that they did become pregnant.

Consent, how it is given (or not given), and how the use of a contraceptive relates to that (i.e. how consent is often conditional – only given under the understanding that a condom is used, for example) is an even more important aspect of sex education for disabled women, especially those who are sexually active.

For individuals with physical disabilities, the situation in Europe is also far from clear. Many are not aware of how or if their state or caring authority can provide them with support relating to their sexual health (such

as the provision of disability-friendly sex toys, for example, but also sex workers for disabled people). This is true for men, women and gender non-conforming individuals.

At the same time, sex education needs to address the issue of care and the role of care institutions. People with physical (and mental) disabilities living in nursing homes also have sexual needs. However, institutions are often not geared towards fulfilling these needs, and on the contrary even try to prevent sexual contacts, for example among residents or with outsiders, by "education", and in some cases also libido-suppressing medication¹¹. In order to protect and strengthen sexual rights, the training of personnel - both nursing staff and management - in care institutions is of great importance.

Did you know that Sex Education...

...is more than "the birds and the bees."



Sexual Education is part of violence prevention and health promotion.

#unexcited

@ ABOUT.SEXEDUCATION

Source: #unexcited – www.sexeducationinfo.com

Sex education for adults needs to be more nuanced and learner-appropriate to help fill the gaps that are left for people with specific needs or differences in relation to their sexuality and sexual rights.

¹⁰ Walmsley, Jan/ Earle, Sarah/ Tilley, Elizabeth/ Ledger, Sue/ Chapman, Ross/ Townson, Lou. 2016. *The experiences of women with learning disabilities on contraception choice*. Open University.

¹¹ Aylott, Jill. 2000. *Sexuality in care homes: expression or oppression?* 2000. In: *Nursing & Residential Care*, September 2000, Vol 2, No 9. P. 430-435

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Encourage more conversation surrounding sexuality and sexual rights of disabled adults
- Empower people with disabilities to make their own choices over their sexuality and reproduction instead of patronising and de-sexualising people
- Make information about the support available to disabled adults more accessible

BEST PRACTICE:

#unexcited. An Erasmus+ project that encourages discourse about sex and sexuality. While not created purely for disabled adults, it has a strong focus on diversity and accessibility for all, providing resources, recommendations and testimonies to help make sex education better tailored for those with disabilities. More information: www.sexeducationinfo.com

3.1.3 For LGBT+¹² adults

Sex education in mainstream education for people in their teens rarely provides adequate support, information, or opportunities to learn for people who are not heterosexual, or do not fit into gender norms. It is, therefore, important that non-formal adult education opportunities are provided for adults who do not identify with their gender as identified at birth, as well as those who are not seeking heterosexual relationships so that they are still able to make healthy and safe decisions, in the interests of their own mental, physical and sexual health, and that of their partners. This information is currently largely shared

¹² Also written as LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Pansexual, Transgender, Genderqueer, Queer, Intersexed, Agender, Asexual, and Ally community

¹³ relating to childbirth and the processes associated with it

within social settings; it should be brought to the mainstream to form a safety net for those who have not found a social group within the LGBT+ community. This knowledge should be accessible for anyone who needs it.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Non-formal, i.e. non-classroom-style, learning to help to separate from mainstream formal learning and schools which may be associated with difficult or unhappy memories
- Mainstreaming of approaches to LGBT+ education in non-formal adult learning to create safe spaces

BEST PRACTICE:

Trans Inclusion Toolkit for Schools and Educational Settings 2019. Gender is not pink and blue. A toolkit that addresses the needs of educators supporting trans and non-binary students, created by a large number of local authorities and civil society organisations in LGBT+ rights and education in the UK. More information: <https://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Trans-Inclusion-Toolkit-for-Schools-and-Education-Settings-Oxfordshire-2019-FINAL.pdf>

3.2 Obstetric¹³ education

In April 2019, the UN published a report denouncing obstetric violence as a human rights violation¹⁴. In this context, it is important to recognise the role that adult education can play in prevention of obstetric violence. In a submission for the UN rapporteur on violence against women, Make Mothers Matter¹⁵ (MMM) address

¹⁴ https://eipmh.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/UN_Res.71170..pdf

¹⁵ Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is a global NGO created in 1947 representing and defending mothers.

mistreatment and violence against women during reproductive health care with a focus on childbirth. MMM recognise that many women do not have access to information or appropriate learning opportunities on their rights, the choices available to them, or the procedures that will be involved in their birth. Without this information, women are not always able to identify cases of abuse or may feel that they are poorly informed. As a result, they put all the responsibility in the hands of health professionals without understanding exactly what is happening to them. There are countless instances of obstetric abuse which, with the provision of appropriate education for all pregnant women, could be reduced: providing women with understanding of their rights, and better insight into the possibility that things will not go to plan.

Obstetric violence is not only a problem affecting the developing world as a result of a lack of access to proper healthcare and health education. The medicalisation of birth and pregnancy in Europe has changed the nature of violence and abuse rather than ending it. This is especially true in connection with birth processes in which mothers are denied their right to self-determination, and especially for women of colour. Not believing or disregarding the needs and wishes of pregnant women can have dramatic consequences, though: according to

the World Health Organisation, women of colour are 60 % more likely to die during childbirth.¹⁶

This demonstrates a need for training as well as non-formal and informal learning opportunities of nurses, midwives, and other obstetric doctors and medical staff to recognise their biases and actively attempt to counteract them during practice. At the same time, a push is needed to make birth education for future parents, such as provided by antenatal classes, more available and accessible.

There is very little official reporting on the rates of obstetric violence in Europe but when provided with the opportunity to share experiences of obstetric violence (on social media for example), women in their thousands provided testimonials¹⁷. This gives an indication of how extensive the problem is, but also the need for women to be provided with a more official means of expressing their experiences. In realising that these cases are not isolated incidents, European women have become more anxious to share their stories¹⁸.

3.2.1 Birth education

A great deal of obstetric violence in Europe comes down to the lack of basic autonomy for birthing mothers. Hospital protocols in many European countries call for the use of blank agreement forms allowing medical staff to do whatever they feel is necessary¹⁹ – this means that the use of more extreme

¹⁶ World Health Organisation. 2017. Factsheet on the SDGs. Maternal and newborn health data. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/maternal-and-newborn-health/data-and-statistics>

¹⁷ Make Mothers Matter. May 2019. *For the UN rapporteur on violence against women on Mistreatment and violence against women during reproductive health care with a focus on childbirth.* <https://makemothersmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/201905-Final-submission-to-UN-rapporteur-obstetric-violence-updated.pdf>

¹⁸ M. Blondin for the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. September 2019. *Obstetrical and*

gynaecological violence. Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe. <http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/Pdf/Textes/Provisoires/2019/20190912-ObstetricalViolence-EN.pdf> / see also the campaign of the UK newspaper The Guardian from 2018 and 2019 to share difficult childbirth experiences, e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/sep/19/yes-hes-alive-but-im-not-ok-the-bloody-truth-about-childbirth>

¹⁹ Make Mothers Matter. May 2019. *For the UN rapporteur on violence against women on Mistreatment and violence against women during reproductive health care with a focus on childbirth.*

and often needless interventions can occur, without the consent of the mother with no real medical grounds for their use. Without access to proper information beforehand, women are often entirely in the dark about the power they are signing away with these forms.

Total disregard for consent or lack thereof is an instance of abuse which is even more concerning. There are a number of instances of medical practitioners completely ignoring mothers' active and clear refusal to undergo certain procedures²⁰, such as unnecessary episiotomies that are being justified by the child's healthy birth.

Information on rights and processes throughout pregnancy and birth should not be something that women have to actively seek: it should be presented to them and accessible as standard. That includes versions for women with accessibility issues (deaf or visually impaired women for example) and appropriate support and interpretation for women who cannot speak the native language. A number of charities and civil society organisations across Europe are trying to collect data on the extent and nature of abuse, and provide women with information on their birthing rights and procedures in order to begin a proper system of prevention in Europe.

Antenatal classes for future parents can help to reduce the risk of obstetric violence during childbirth. If birthing partners (male and female) are also included properly in educational opportunities, they are able to support their pregnant partner, acting as an advocate during the birth and helping to have the pregnant woman's experiences and wishes heard. In antenatal classes future parents can also learn to draw up a

birth plan in which the parents' wishes for the birth and afterwards, especially medical interventions, are recorded.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Respect of cultural preferences or practices of the mother
- Training and non-formal and informal learning opportunities for nurses, mid-wives and other medical staff involved in pregnancy and birth
- Special training for medical staff working with women who are victims of trauma
- Importance for education opportunities for the partners of pregnant women (in order for them to understand the process and better support their partner and their partners' wishes during the birth)
- Flexibility in provision for future parents
- Flexibility in terms of recommendations – recognising the different options for new mothers and not passing judgement on women's decisions providing it is clear that the parent has properly considered its implications (e.g. choosing not to breastfeed, choosing to supplement breast milk with formula, choosing
- Diverse provision to cater for many different levels of education, language and literacy
- Education for first-time mothers as well as mothers with previous births that is up to date with the latest medical and natal knowledge, including also peer-to-peer learning with other mothers

²⁰ Safe Birth Project. March 2018. *What is consent during labour?*

BEST PRACTICES:

gANC/Hooyo project in Sweden. gANC – group Anti Natal Care gANC incorporates pregnancy assessments and group sessions for education, support and dialogue in a group of pregnant women. Somali women have often been excluded from pre-natal learning due to limited language skills, but gANC helps to make intercultural dialogue a part of pregnancy education. The gANC model is especially impressive because of this incorporation of Swedish language skills, social integration, and social interaction into anti-natal care.

Birthrights. A UK organisation who provide online resources and information on rights during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as what to expect. Birthrights also run trainings for professionals working in birth and pregnancy to ensure they are supportive of mothers and their needs.

<https://www.birthrights.org.uk/>

3.2.2 Abortion Education

Unwanted pregnancies due to a number of reasons are a common occurrence, and estimates say that every fifth pregnancy around the world ends in abortion²¹.

Abortion education starts from the premise that it is not possible to talk about the health and well-being of girls and women without also addressing reproductive health - and thus abortion. Nevertheless, or rather because of the lack of sufficient health education for women, the subject of abortion is largely taboo. This leads to unsafe practices or insufficient knowledge about abortion methods and services.

Doctors who offer abortions are also burdened by this taboo and have to operate

in the legal grey area due to unclear legal situations.

It is essential to provide factual information on health and abortion rights, and to create a safe space in which this issue can be discussed without fear of discrimination or legal prosecution. Public education plays a role here, as does education in the formal, non-formal and informal spheres.

Educational offers must above all ensure that the debate on the topic remains open and accessible, and that it does not so much shed light on the pros and cons of abortion as on how the decision to have an abortion is made and the background to it.



Source: Comprehensive Abortion Care Ghana

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Create a safe space to debate, for instance by agreeing that nothing that is discussed will leave the room, or by giving the possibility to ask questions in an anonymous way through a “letter box”
- Be inclusive and also make sure that the topic is discussed from various cultural, religious and/or political

²¹ International Planned Parenthood Federation. 2016. How to educate about abortion. A guide for peer educators, teachers and trainers.

https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/2016-05/ippf_peereducationguide_abortion_final.pdf

angles, while avoiding a bias into a certain direction

- Use accurate and up-to-date information about abortion in one's region, country; laws; practices and methods etc. and provide information about services

BEST PRACTICE:

Comprehensive Abortion Care. The Comprehensive Abortion Care project (CAC) in Ghana seeks to reduce unsafe abortion practices among young women between the age of 10 to 24 years by advocating and promoting comprehensive abortion care to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity in Ghana by 2020.

3.3 Education for victims of gender-based violence

The 'do no harm' principle or approach to adult learning becomes especially poignant when addressing education for victims of abuse or trauma suffers. It is important that these learners feel supported, do not feel pressure to share their experiences, and are given a voice that they otherwise may feel has been taken from them. Adult educators should avoid the mentality that they are in no way connected to their students' period of recovery. The most successful approaches to rehabilitation for trauma victims requires support from a number of different influences. Adult education can easily lend itself to providing

a safe space away from home or therapy where victims can process if needed²². Victims could prefer single gender learning spaces during their recovery, or may need to be warned if the course is likely to bring up texts or resources which could be triggering. Victims of gendered traumas (sexualised violence, PTSD following birth or pregnancy) may find that their triggers are integral to many of the resources being a part of daily life for many learners (the depiction of relationships dysfunctional or otherwise, mentions of sex, pregnancy and birth etc.).

For male victims of sexualised or gender-based violence the recommendations that exist are much more limited. This only adds to the stigma or taboo that surrounds male victims. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 covers gender based violence in times of crisis, focusing almost entirely on female victims²³. By creating a hegemony within our society that looks at GBV (gender-based violence) victims as exclusively female, in turn this creates an image of victims as inherently feminine.

Christine Buckwald takes the 'masculinity theory'²⁴ (focusing on Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of dominance) to explain why male victims of GBV, if not supported and affirmed that they are no less of a man as a result, can turn to violence against women to reassert their 'dominance'²⁵.

²² C. Buckwald. 2016. *What Men Do Not Speak About: Sexualised Violence During War and its Consequences*. Contemporary Issues and Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education. Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy (University of Belgrade), European Society for Research in Adult Education (ESREA), and Adult Education Society, Serbia

²³ United Nations Security Council. 2000. Resolution 1325

²⁴ C. Buckwald. 2016. *What Men Do Not Speak About: Sexualised Violence During War and its Consequences*. Contemporary Issues and

Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education. Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy (University of Belgrade), European Society for Research in Adult Education (ESREA), and Adult Education Society, Serbia

²⁵ C. Buckwald. 2016. *What Men Do Not Speak About: Sexualised Violence During War and its Consequences*. Contemporary Issues and Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education. Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy (University of Belgrade), European Society for Research in Adult Education (ESREA), and Adult Education Society, Serbia

Thus, in order to end the cycle of abuse, it is important that male victims get the support they need. A part of this is gender education which seeks to understand what masculinity really means, entails, and how one's gender is not decided or impacted by traumatic experiences. Gender sensitivity training for adults, if more common and widespread, could be used as a means for reducing the strength of hegemonic masculinity to begin with.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Make single gender spaces available
- Discourage any pressure to speak about experiences, let survivors share on their own terms
- Provide information on other support services available to survivors if you feel you are out of your depth
- Provide trigger warnings and allow people to miss lessons or resources that could cause emotional distress to learners

4 EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

4.1 Civic/political education

Gender is a determining factor for needs or aims in adult education. The Gender and Learning study by AONTAS²⁶ found that women were especially interested in political education. This had a very direct impact on their engagement with local and national level politics and encouraged them to engage in citizenship education more broadly. Men in the study, on the other hand, felt that political education was a waste of time and showed very little interest.

With different interests and focuses come different aims and objectives – this needs to be reflected by tailor-made learning opportunities, which should start to recognise that gender as well as other factors can have an impact on the interests or objectives of the learner. Content should be altered by gender to suit the needs and

wishes of the individual. Men engage much more thoroughly in leisure education when it is less objective-driven as there is no possibility of failure²⁷; however, in employment-focused adult education, they take a much more instrumental and focused approach to learning. Women, on the other hand, are generally very involved in the extracurricular life of adult education. However, this also shows that commitment and interest in various topics and areas is also determined by the methods used in adult education and should under no circumstances be understood as "intrinsic".

In terms of political education for women, it is not only necessary to recognise women's interest in political learning: adult education should also be considered a tool for improving the overall rates of women representation in government (locally, nationally and internationally), and how they

²⁶ King, Peadar. O'Driscoll, Sheila. Holden, Stephanie. 2002. *Gender and Learning*. Commissioned by AONTAS on behalf of the Dept. of Education and Science.

²⁷ Golding, Barry. *Contemporary Issues and Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education, Critical Reflections on the Role of the Men's Shed Movement in Changing Perceptions about Learning by Older Men in Community Settings*.

engage politically within their communities in a less formal format.

BEST PRACTICE:

SHE – see her elected. The SHE project was created to help improve gender diversity in local politics in the Republic of Ireland. This project is working on a rural level to help women who would otherwise not been able to access political education better understand their roles in local government and recognise how many of their daily tasks are inherently political. <https://www.seeherelected.ie/>

their own financial literacy than women (all other factors held equal)²⁸.

Increasing financial literacy as well as empowerment of women to reclaim their rights should, therefore, be among the priorities for reaching financial gender equality²⁹. The need for financial literacy, however, affects all genders, not just women: basic knowledge of the world of finance as well as of one's own budget management, financial responsibility and financially sustainable behaviour benefit everyone, individuals of all genders, families

The gender wage gap in apprenticeships in Europe

Apprenticeships (a form of Vocational Education and Training, VET) provide different experiences based on gender – especially in terms of pay. The Institute for Employment Studies found that in the United Kingdom, there was a presence of a gender pay gap between male and female apprentices. This gap is due in part to the fact that female apprentices are generally older than male ones, but there is no difference in pay rates: if the statistics are sorted to balance out age, a gender pay gap becomes clear¹. This demonstrates a need for viewing adult education opportunities through a gendered lens: it must be done in order to eradicate differences between male and female apprentices, which could, in turn, lead to more women becoming apprentices overall, no longer held back by concerns about how they will back this decision financially.

4.2 Financial Education for Women

As women, on average, are not only earning less in their lifetimes, but also live longer and work for fewer years. As a result, especially in old age, they are at greater risk of financial difficulties or problems than their male counterparts. This exacerbates such issues as the pension gender gap (which is already an issue due to differences in earnings throughout men and women's lifetimes). Evidence shows that men, on the other hand, are consistently more open to financial risk, more motivated by financial gain (instead of financial security), and more confident in

and society. The importance of financial literacy should also be reflected in learning opportunities and integrated into all areas of adult education, such as citizenship education. Peer-to-peer learning can create a safe atmosphere in which questions of financial action and planning can be discussed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Tailor outreach programmes to target women, especially women working unstable jobs
- Make financial education a part of other broader learning opportunities: such as during citizenship education

²⁸ M. Powell, D. Ansic. 1997. *Gender differences in risk behaviour in financial decision-making: An experimental analysis*. Journal of Economic Psychology. Elsevier.

²⁹ OECD/INFE Policy Guidance on Addressing Women's and Girls' Needs for Financial Awareness and Education

- Peer-to-peer learning can create safe environments to discuss issues openly without fear of being patronised

BEST PRACTICE:

Women's International Financial Education, wife.org – Money Clubs. The Money Club programme, based in the USA, encourages women to meet and share information, ideas and knowledge on saving, budgeting, expenses, retirement and other financial issues. These workshops, run for women by women, help to prevent women from feeling patronised or judged for confusion or lack of knowledge surrounding their finances.

4.3 Full-time mothers, re-joining the labour market

In Europe (and worldwide), women are more likely to take on unpaid care responsibilities in the home than men. As such, if or when they choose to return to paid work and the labour market, specific educational support could be incredibly valuable for supporting women in this change. After a period of work outside paid employment, it can easily happen that the skills and knowledge of full-time parents are no longer adequate for the labour market: either because of a lack of recent qualifications or simply because employers criticise long-term absences from the labour market.

Providing quality non-formal and informal educational opportunities to parents or primary caregivers has a direct benefit not only on parents, but on their children: parents with a greater interest in their own education find, on average, that their sons and daughters are more likely to engage in education in their later life (both formally, through university or vocational education and training, or through non-formal learning). Those parents who do more of

their work in unpaid reproductive work – on average, more women than men – should also have correspondingly better access to learning opportunities as well as procedures to validate their skills and knowledge.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Focus on helping parents to validate and recognise the skills and knowledge that they already possess
- Use primary schools and other locations for outreach, rather than depend on word of mouth etc. to help push support out to parents who would not normally seek these opportunities
- Provide childcare or other incentives during courses to encourage engagement of full-time parents

BEST PRACTICES:

Working Mums. An organisation which provides flexible online training opportunities to full-time parents allowing them to make the move from their care responsibilities to paid work more fluid. The training opportunities they provide lead to careers which are more flexible and family friendly. <https://www.workingmums.co.uk/>

Parents At Work. A programme working to help make workplaces more accessible for parents/family friendly. <https://parentsandcarersatwork.com>

4.4 Education for migrant women

Women in migrant families, especially mothers, are a classic example of 'double disadvantage'. Their language levels are on average lower than of their male counterparts, they are less likely to be in employment (which is also a contributing factor to social inclusion), and are frequently only addressed by educational or integrational programmes as a mother, and not as an individual in their own right.

With refugee men and women, the differences are even more extreme: refugee women describe themselves as having much worse physical and mental health than their male counterparts. They are less likely to have received a solid education before fleeing as a refugee. They are significantly less likely to speak the language of their country of destination.



MIGRANT WOMEN AS CHAMPIONS OF LEARNING

Source: WIDTH project – Women in Diaspora as Champions for Learning to Live together

Finally, female refugees often find themselves attempting to care for and support their children, in addition to their own personal needs. This is less often the

case for male refugees. While the majority of asylum applications are made by men, conservative estimates suggest that more women than men now flee to the EU³⁰. Consequently, there is a need for appropriate educative support available to women, to help to tackle their inherent disadvantage: not only as a woman, not only as a migrant, and not only as a refugee.

It is also important that adult education takes an approach that considers the intersectionality³¹ of these disadvantages: a migrant woman of colour's experience is not simply a combination of being a man of colour, a male migrant, and a native white woman. This is why creating diversity in teachers, and in teaching materials is so vital to create a narrative that these women can properly relate to, and learn from.

Many female migrants coming to Europe from other continents are joining a pre-settled family using a family reunification visa. This is important to consider for a number of reasons. Women who are joining family (often a romantic partner/spouse) using this type of visa are more limited in their ability to integrate, as they are generally not allowed to participate in paid work. Employment is an excellent opportunity for development of language, the creation of a social network, and general self-confidence in terms of integration into their new country. As this is not accessible for women on family reunification visas, more steps need to be taken to help them to integrate into their new home. Adult education is an excellent way for doing so.

³⁰ Financial Times. 2020. *Women and children refugee numbers crossing into Europe surge*. <https://www.ft.com/content/df3b5ea-bf99-11e5-9fdb-87b8d15baec2>

³¹ The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as

creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise. (Oxford Dictionary)

Again, it must be said that this applies to all dependent partners or family members, i.e. if men come to Europe on a reunification visa, they must also be given the opportunity to participate in educational programmes for inclusion.

Often, migrant women in language classes find that the language and resources they are learning are not entirely relevant to their lives or linguistic needs. Julia Naish in her article 'The chance to say what they think' discusses how migrant women learning English as their second language found that representation of women in the resources they used was low, and that, when women were included, their experiences were entirely foreign³². These women did not often have access to the same luxuries or experiences as the few women they were reading about: these women did not share the same lifestyle, and the language that they learnt through these stories were more relevant to an upper-middle class housewife than to this group of female migrants.

Migrant women should be provided with tailor-made learning programmes, helping them to develop the language that will be relevant to their lives, and specifically, content that they ask for, being the most prepared to speak about their needs and reasons for learning their host country's language. Secondly, it is vital that these women are provided with content that is relatable to them and their experiences, rather than alienating them during their learning period with examples that seem far-fetched, far from their financial capabilities, or just unrealistic. Providing

women with resources that are written by women, especially women from similar backgrounds, was noted by Naish as a way not only to better engage migrant women, but also to ensure they were getting the most out of this learning opportunity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Introduce diverse texts with diverse authors
- Ensure that women with a similar experience and background are represented in the learning materials
- Tailor-made approach: help women learn the language or develop the skills needed to understand their experiences especially relating to the intersectionality of race/migrant status/gender
- Encourage the social aspects of the learning environment
- Create learning opportunities that are specific to women, rather than focusing on outreach for whole families in a community learning context

BEST PRACTICE:

Mama Lernt Deutsch. Strictly female only classrooms/learning centres that cater to the cultural needs of strictly practicing Muslim women. Help women to feel involved and engaged in their child's learning as well as their own.
<http://www.interface-wien.at/3-eltern-kinder/40-mama-lernt-deutsch> (German website)

³² "'The Chance to Say What They Think' Teaching English as a Second Language." Julia Naish. *Feminist Review* 3, no. 1 (November 1979)

5 TRANS AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING RIGHTS IN EUROPE

One in 20 LGBT+ teens drop out of school due to homophobic or transphobic bullying³³. Adult education, especially second-chance education, can play a key role in helping them develop their employability and receiving a school-leaving certificate or other qualification. This is not the only reason, however, that adult educators should start to tailor opportunities for non-cisgender³⁴ adults. Negative experiences in high school, also in relation to the representation of heterosexuality as the norm in classes as well as learning materials, should be taken into account during adult education provision. The high drop-out rate is a clear example of the discomfort and unhappiness that many transgender students experience. This is highlighted in a much more explicit way by suicide rates amongst school-aged transgender individuals. Creating a learning environment that steps away from the negative experiences and memories that are likely tied to the classroom environment is vital.

Adult education can be used not only for educating and socially including trans- and non-binary persons, but also in helping other adults to change their perceptions and prejudices against them, especially

through citizenship learning for adults. Providing adults with an opportunity to develop more accommodating and tolerant views towards the trans- and gender non-conforming community, should be a pillar of European citizenship.

At present, there are very few examples of training or non-formal learning opportunities designed specifically to cater for gender non-conforming adults, nor are there many examples of using adult learning to educate about transgender issues in Europe. Hopefully this will be amended in the near future.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Non-school style environments
- Do not allow discourse or discussions to question the validity of trans or non-binary individuals
- Do not push trans or non-binary adults to share personal experiences or trauma, allow them to share as they see fit and without creating a stigma around their participation in ALE

³³ Safe at school: Education sector responses to violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity. April 2018. Council of Europe.

³⁴ Cisgender: a term referring to those people whose gender identity and gender expression match the sex they were assigned at birth and the social

expectations related to their gender. (ILGA Europe) Non-cisgender, therefore, refers to people whose gender identity and gender expression do not match the sex they were assigned at birth and the social expectations related to their gender.

6 CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the topic of "gender" in the context of adult learning and education encompasses a great many areas of one's personal and social life and cannot be reduced to questions of gender and gender roles - or whether, for example, raising awareness that every time there is talk of chairmen, chairwomen must be mentioned as well. The issue of intersectionality further complicates the issue: a migrant woman might have other learning needs than a local woman, a transgender person has probably experienced different educational challenges than a cisgender person, and a working-class man will very likely also be interested in different learning contents and approaches than a top-manager of a company.

Although gender and cultural studies have already done a great deal to explore this field, it is still a relatively unexplored area for adult education. Even in adult education, depending on the political context in which it is embedded, it is not entirely undisputed. A small anecdote about this: a few months ago, Elm Magazine, a European magazine for adult education, published a thematic issue on sexuality education. Facebook then closed Elm's Facebook page "because of the problematic content". Since then, it is also no longer allowed to share links to the Elm website on Facebook, even if they lead to completely different topics and content. It is very likely that Elm was reported as problematic on Facebook by readers. This says a great deal about the stigmas with which the content of sex education is still afflicted – but also, how important adult education is in creating new approaches to topics of sexuality, gender identities, etc.

To this end, adult education must also reflect on its existing approaches as well as its social and political backgrounds, and what values it wants to convey. In some (or many) areas this probably also means that adult education must transform itself in order to be "transformative", especially when it comes to questions of identity that are closely related to gender.



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