

AROGYAM Consultation on Conceptual and Methodological Challenges in Studying the Intersections of Gender with Other Social Inequalities

Achutha Menon Centre for Health Science Studies, Trivandrum

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Organisers: Professor Ravindran

The Gender sub-theme group of AROGYAM brought together researchers from the collaborating institutions interested in

- Raising the visibility of gender issues within mainstream public health spaces;
- Studying gender within a social justice framework, and
- Examining the intersections of gender with other axes of vulnerability and other systems of oppression such as casteism, racism, classism and heteronormativity.

Researchers concerned with health equity and social justice often have to contend with the reality that gender rarely, if ever, operates alone. Gender-based disadvantages often interact with and are reinforced by other axes of discrimination and oppression, for example, on the basis of class, caste/ethnicity, indigenous status, religion, disability, sexual orientation and so on. 'Intersectionality' is the perspective that seeks to examine the many ways in which sex and gender interact with these other variables to influence the many dimensions of health, ranging from exposure to health risks and health-seeking behaviour to health outcomes and the social and economic consequences following ill-health.

Studies on gender and health in India are relatively few, and those from an 'intersectionalities' perspective are even fewer. There are several conceptual and methodological challenges involved in studying the influence of multiple variables on health, and in understanding the processes through which this influence happens. The consultation reviewed the state of the art and took us forward conceptually and methodologically.

The consultation mapped and explored current understandings on intersections of gender with other social inequalities, and implications for health equity research. Through an intensive small group discussion and consolidation exercise, participants gained deeper conceptual clarity and better acquaintance with robust methodological approaches to studying the influence on health equity of the intersection of gender with other axes of inequalities and vulnerabilities. The consultation explored, among others, the following questions:

- To what extent have studies examining gender as a social determinant of health factored in the interaction of gender with other variables? Which are the variables of intersection that have been studied? What have been their findings?
- What have been definitions and concepts used and the methodological approaches adopted (quantitative as well as qualitative) for studying the influence on health of gender in combination with other variables? What are the strengths and limitations of these? What modifications would make these more robust?

There were 25 invited participants; 15 MPH students attended as observers. At the end of the workshop, we arrived at a consensus on some basic 'do's and don'ts for health equity research in India examining gender alongside other social inequalities. We plan to publish the proceedings of this Consultation and developed plans for taking this agenda forward through identifying priority themes/topics for health equity research in India.