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PUBLIC LECTURE

How big is the problem of violence against women? The challenge of intersectional measurement at the global level

Wednesday 14 March 5.30pm – 7.30pm

Speaker

Professor Sally Engle Merry

New York University



Location Theatre 1 Hedley Bull
Building 130, Corner Liversidge St and
Garran Road, ANU

RVSP

W <http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/how-big-problem-violence-against-women-challenge-intersectional-measurement-global-level>

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Until the 1970s, there was very little research on violence against women and scant information on its frequency and distribution by race, class, age, and other social characteristics. As the social movement against rape and domestic violence developed in many parts of the world during the 1980s, statistics on the incidence of these problems were essential in order to show that this was a pervasive and significant problem. But the demand for numbers in order to justify activism has long confronted difficult problems of how to count violence against women. The challenges include what to consider violence, how to gather data, how to encourage women to talk about their experiences with violence, and how to persuade governments to invest resources in doing this research.

There are now efforts to construct surveys at the global level in order to assess the extent of the problem. Yet global efforts confront all the above problems as well as the need to understand variations by factors such as race, poverty, disability, urban/rural residence, and age. This requires disaggregating data on the basis of intersectional categories. But what are the relevant categories and how much it will cost to add more? Moreover, the need to count incidents of violence against women contradicts the ability to understand these actions as deeply embedded in conceptions of kinship, marriage, gender, and violence as well as the trajectory of ongoing relationships. Instead, quantification means they are seen only as isolated incidents.

This talk explores these challenges and the efforts of the United Nations to come up with a set of indicators to measure violence against women globally. While the UN effort is fraught with difficulty and ultimately misses a great deal, it also is essential in order to support the global social movement against violence against women.

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About the speaker

Sally Engle Merry is Silver Professor of Anthropology at New York University. She is also a Faculty Director of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice at the New York University School of Law, and past president of the American Ethnological Society.

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