RAISING AWARENESS AND COMBATTING DIGITAL GENDER BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING

R. Monera Ortiz, L. Freude, C. Camps Calvet, E. Almeda Samaranch, J. Bonet Martí, C. Vivancos, A. Morero Beltrán

Universitat de Barcelona (SPAIN)

Abstract

Digital Gender Based Violence (DGBV) is a growing social problem and affects especially younger people. DGBV describes any kind of Gender Based Violence (GBV) related with new Information and Communication Technologies. To combat DGBV we designed the teaching innovation project "Digital gender-based violence: learning from feminisms" aiming to contribute to the eradication of digital sexist violence in order to promote healthy digital relationships. The project is part of the broader Service Learning project of the University of Barcelona "Sharing Ideas – University goes to High school": In the classes at University, students will learn the curriculum specific content, to develop a workshop to be implemented in short sessions with high school students.

We implement the project at the University of Barcelona in the subjects Social Control (6 ECTS, compulsory) and Sociology of Genders (3 ECTS, optional) of the Sociology Bachelor. Beside the high schools, the project also involves the feminist third sector organization Alia complementing the university students' training on DGBV. The different actors involved underline the inter-institutional character of the project. The project is a special Service Learning experience as it applies feminist research and teaching methodologies, emphasizing social transformation of gender inequalities.

For our project, we share our research results on DGBV with our students in order to enable them to identify and recognize what are DGBV and why they occur. Therefor we expose our own research answering the following questions: what profiles are most affected? What are the profiles of the aggressors? What are the survivors' reactions on DGBV and how do they evaluate them? For the introductory sessions, we count with the support of the third sector association Alia. The main objective of these activities is to raise the awareness of existing DGBV between adolescents and young people. In addition, we aim to share tools to protect themselves from DGBV as well as to deal with DGBV in order to finally eradicate DGBV.

We wonder if the project achieves its goals: Do university students acquire new content at class? Are the contents we provide university students with helpful in order to prepare the workshops at school? What are the additional contents and competences acquired during the workshops at school? Do the high school students benefit from the workshop in terms of contents and competences? We also assess gender differences taking into account gender and paying specially attention to non-binary identified persons.

In order to assess these research questions, we consider observation of the sessions, students' reflections (qualitative) as well as a quantitative questionnaire.

Keywords: Digital Gender Based Violence, Service Learning, Gender, Feminist Methodology, Sociology.

1 INTRODUCTION

Gender Based Violence (GBV) constitutes an important social problem referring to "violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately" ([1]). As such, it affects especially women and LGTBQ* ([2]). With the increasing digitalization of our lives Gender Based Violence online, further in the text Digital Gender Based Violence (DGBV) is gaining importance ([1], [3]). In the following, we rely on the UN Women's definition adding LGBTQ* people. For the UN Women DGBV is "any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of ICT, such as mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or email, against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately" ([3], p. 8).

Núria Vergés and Adriana Gil-Juárez recently summed up the existing literature on DGBV ([2]). Despite growing visibility of GBV and DGBV we still need to increment our efforts to overcome them, and this

project aims to put its grain of sand. GBV need to be understood as a structural phenomenon imbricated in sexism, racism, capitalism, and other forms of oppression, being DGBV their continuity in the digital space. Though we understand GBV and DGBV as a continuum, it is important to underline the specificity that digital violence can be more harmful on the long run ([4]) and has an important impact on political participation, working and learning opportunities as well as physical and psychological health. Occurring digitally, DGBV often remain undetected as such ([2]). Considering that time spend online is growing especially between adolescents and young adults ([5]), working with university and High school students is central to raise awareness and combat DGBV. According to data, women and LGTBQ* persons suffer most DGBV ([6]) and racialization aggrieves the exposition the threads or non-consented sexual content ([7], [8]); younger people are overexposed, too ([9], [10], [11]). Feminist activists and women with high public visibility such as journalists, politicians or academics are also object of DGBV ([12], [13], [14], [15]).

The feminist collective Donestech from Catalonia distinguishes between four types of DGBV ([16]). First, sexist harassment such as insulting, humiliating and undermining self-esteem via TRIC. Second, sexualized violence online attempting against the sexual liberty such as sexspreading, sexual harassment online, sextortion, online exhibitionism as well as the censorship of female sexuality. Third, digital intimate partner violence as controlling or censoring virtual relations or using spyware. Fourth, attacks against the feminist movements or visible women via insults or slut shaming, cracking accounts or webs as well as sending threads.

1.1 Service-Learning in the Teaching of Sociology

Sociology is a discipline with a tradition of the analysis of inequalities, as well as the development of strategies to overcome them to archive an equal society ([17], [18], [19]). GBV and DGBV constitute therefore an important field of research for sociologists. In this communication, we share first results from our research project eGBVHelp! Tackling and responding to online gender-based violence through a pioneering e-helpline for reporting GBV online and empowering women, girls and LGBTIQ+ persons and professionals. The project is funded by the Justice Programme "Rights, Equality and Citizenship" of the European Union.

All of us do research as well as teaching in Sociology. We are engaged to implement a feminist perspective in both research ([20], [21]) and teaching ([22]). For some of us, Service Learning (S-L) has proofed to be a tool for feminist research and teaching ([23], [24]). S-L is "an educational proposal that combines learning and community service processes in a single and well-articulated project in which participants are educated while they work on real needs of the community with the aim of improving it" ([25], p. 61). The case we share here comes from a broader teaching innovation project "Sharing Ideas. The University goes to Highschool" based on S-L implemented by the University of Barcelona ([26]; [27]). S-L has shown to have positive effects on university students as well as community partners ([28]). For students there is abundant research underlining its positive effects for the acquisition of transversal competences as communication skills ([29]), teamwork ([30]), as well as specific contents ([31]) and empathy ([32], [33]) and empowerment ([34]). In addition, S-L can help in the process of professional orientation ([35], [36]). The challenges of S-L reside in the establishment of a genuine and long-term commitment with the community, organizational shortcomings in terms of preparation and coordination ([33]) as well as a superficial and extractavist service ([37]). Another problem is how University students reach an equal encounter of different knowledge without privileging the academic one ([38]).

Feminist scholars have claimed S-L to commit with social transformation through feminism ([39]), introducing gender perspective to their S-L experiences ([23], [40]) and gender sensitive courses ([38], [41], [42], [43]). Concerning the gender impact of S-L experiences, we know that women tend to be more interested to participate ([44]). In case of GBV S-L raises the awareness of violence and enables participants to engage against violence ([40], [45], [46]). Concerning sexual orientation, we dispose of less information: some argue that LGTBQ* engage less in S-L ([47]). We know even less about the (gendered) community: Núria Vergés and her equip showed that their intervention on service learning was gender sensitive and binary participants evaluated to service more positive ([23]).

In this teaching innovation project, university students design and implement a workshop based on class contents to high school students. In our optional undergrad course Sociology of Genders of 3 ECTS our students already participated offering workshops on Gender and Substance (ab)use ([48]) as well as boosting women's presence in ICT ([49]) where they are underrepresented ([50]).

To put it in a nutshell: in the framework of a pioneering European Research Project on DGBV we developed a teaching innovation based on Service Learning in our course Sociology of Genders. Here we are going to evaluate if

- University students acquire new content at class considering DGBV?

- There are differences according to gender and according to the participation in the SL experience.

- Do the contents we provide university students with are helpful in order to prepare the workshops at school?

- Are additional contents and competences acquired during the workshops at school?

- Do the high school students benefit from the workshop in terms of contents and competences?

2   METHODOLOGY

In terms of methods, we situate our approach in multi-method ([51]) and feminist methodologies ([20], [21]). The strength of multi-method designs is that different techniques can complement each other to draw a more realistic image of the research object ([51]). We therefore rely on quantitative methods as well as qualitative methods, mainly a questionnaire, observation and narratives on the experiences. Concerning the feminist approach, we consider that the choice of the topic – DGBV – already constitutes a feminist epistemic claim on the research agenda ([20]). In addition, we work with gender and sexual identity as key variables of the evaluation ([20]).

Here we expose the evaluation of two learning situations: first, the seminar held by a member of the feminist collective at our University Course Sociology of Genders; and second, the workshop three of our students held in a High school in Barcelona.

During the seminar at University, three equip members observed the session paying special attention to participation, gender differences and differences between students participating in SL and those who did not participate. In addition, we asked students to fill out a questionnaire on their knowledge on competences and content concerning DGBV; after the seminar, we asked the same questions in order to detect changes. We also asked for overall satisfaction. All items were evaluated on a scale from cero (do not agree at all) to 10 (totally agree).

For the workshop our students gave at High school, we also observed the workshop: here we were interested to see if they reached a mutual exchange with the High school students; we also wanted to know how the High school students reacted on the topic of DGBV. Finally, we looked for unequal participation in terms of gender, ethnicity, or another axis. Like the workshop at University, we collected data on competences as well as content knowledge before and after the workshop, asking for High School student's satisfaction too. Regarding our students running the workshop we based asked them to send us a written reflection as well as a short exposition on their experience for their classmates.

For the analysis of the quantitative data, we controlled on gender and sexual orientation differences.

3   RESULTS

For the results, we share firstly our observations during the seminar and the workshop. We then present the quantitative evaluation of the workshop at University, finishing with the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the workshop at the high school.

As commented before, the experience consisted in two important sessions integrated in the optional Sociology of Genders course (3 ECTS) in the fourth and last year of the Bachelor of Science in Sociology (240 ECTS). We impart the assignment weekly for 2 hours. At the 25th November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we dedicated the weekly class to the seminar on DGBV inviting a member of Alia / Donestech, a feminist collective and third sector organization, exposing their work. During the seminar we observed both gender biases and differential participation depending on the participation in the SL project.

The second evidence is the workshop three our students implement a week after this session in a Highschool, based on Sociology Genders and especially the seminar on DGBV. Here we observed how the workshop went, taking into account both our students' performance paying attention to contents and competences, as well as the participants' reactions.

3.1   Observation of the Service-Learning experience

Concerning the seminar at University we observed that the whole group paid attention to the seminar, listening quietly, and positioning themselves towards the invited speaker. They participated all actively

when their participation was required, and the distractive use of laptops and mobile phones was much less extended than in an ordinary class; men distracted themselves over proportionally compared to women. The informal comments on the seminar were much more extended between the assisting women underlining that the topic affected them overproportionally. Concerning the participation of three students participating in the SL project (the three students who prepared the workshop for high school students afterwards), we were surprised by a less active participation. Though their informal participation was high, one of them arrived late, none of them raised specific questions or participated more actively in the interactive part of the seminar.

During the workshop at school, we observed that our University students implemented a well-structured and participatory workshop, summing-up class-contend. They arranged the chairs in a cycle and started with an introduction of themselves and the participants gathering examples of DGBV proposed by the high school students. Afterwards they ordered the different proposals in a grid according to the definition of Vergés Bosch and Donestech ([16]). Then, they distributed different cases of DGBV and discussed the cases and possible strategies to resolve them with the students. In this sense, the whole workshop was participative and horizontal, and the timing was adequate.

3.2   Quantitative evaluation of the workshop at University

At our classes, physical assistance is recommended but not compulsory. Being present is therefore an indicator for interest in the seminar on DGBV. We can see that seventeen of the forty matriculated students and assisted. For a rainy day, 42,5% of presence is a regular assistance. Considering that the three students who participate in the SL project are all present (100%), shows that their interest in the workshop is much higher.

Concerning gender biases, we can observe that in terms the whole class, women have a slightly higher participation rate than men. Considering the voluntary participation in SL we can see that women are clearly overrepresented. This might confirm that women are more interested to participate in SL ([23]; [24]; [44]).

Table 1. Participation rate Workshop at University.

	Total students	Present students	Participation rate in %
Total students	40	17	42.5%
- Men	*10*	*4*	*40,0%*
- Women	*30*	*13*	*43,4%*
Participation SL	40	3	7.5%
- Men	*10*	*0*	*0.0%*
- Women	*30*	*3*	*10.0%*

Considering the acquisition of class specific Competences and Content Table 2 shows an increment in all the items. In this sense the formation has been positive, especially if we take into account the key competences to identify, distinguish and explain DGBV as well as how to act in case of suffering or observing others suffering DGBV. In all items students improved between 2 and 3 points. Considering Gender, we noticed that men and non-binary participants departed from lower scores in terms of competences and contents before the workshop; after the workshop, their control of competences and content improved but the workshop did not equalize them with women who continued to score higher in competences and contents. The three students who participated voluntarily in the SL project indicated higher scores in the terms of content but no differences in terms of competences before the workshop. After the workshop, they situate slightly below the mean in terms of content. We explain the previous content knowledge of the participants in SL by the fact that they already prepared their topic before the specific class on DGBV.

Table 2. Acquisition of Class specific Competences and Content.

	Mean pre	N	Mean post	N	Variation
I know what DGBV are.	7,69	16	8,94	16	1,25
The Internet and Relationship, Information and Communication Technologies (TRICs) are free of sexism.	0,80	15	0,31	16	-0,49
Big technology platforms like Google and Facebook are co-responsible for DGBV.	7,44	16	8,44	16	1,00
I am able to identify DGBV.	6,19	16	8,44	16	2,25
I can tell the difference between different types of DGBV.	5,38	16	8,06	16	2,69
I know how to help a friend who is suffering DGBV.	5,31	16	8,38	16	3,06
I know what to do when I suffer DGBV.	5,20	15	7,67	15	2,47
I can explain what DGBV is.	6,25	16	8,31	16	2,06

Table 3 refers to the satisfaction with the workshop. The values show that training on DGBV is useful and necessary to Sociology students and that the specific session has been well developed.

Table 3. Satisfaction with the Workshop at University.

	Mean	N
I have understood the contents developed.	8,44	16
I have learned new content on DGBV.	8,38	16
The training was useful to me.	8,31	16
The material helped me to understand the contents.	8,31	16
Overall assessment of the training.	8,38	16

3.3   Quantitative evaluation of the workshop at the High School

The High School students' participation in the questionnaire can be interpreted as an indicator of will to collaborate. Before the workshop, the response rate is extremely high, descending a bit after the workshop. We explain this, not that much by interest, but by the fact that the workshop lengthened until the break and the High School students did not want to spend their break on responding our questionnaire. This seems to be even truer for men, than for women.

Table 4. Participation rate Workshop at University.

	Total students	Response Rate before the workshop	Response Rate after the workshop
Total students	25	96.00	68.00
- Men	7	100.00	57.14
- Women	18	94.74	77.78

In terms of content and competences, Table 5 underlines that the High School students depart from very limited contents and competences on DGBV, but that the workshop increases the score of both importantly. These increments are specially accentuated in the case of distinguishing between different types of DGBV, knowing what DGBV are as well as being able to help a friend who suffers DGBV. In terms of gender, we observed that women score lower in the previous and posterior evaluation of competences and contents. The effect of the workshop – that is the variation between previous and posterior evaluation – is stronger between women. Considering sexual orientation, non-heterosexuals tend to be more conscious of internet as a sexist space, feel more able to identify DGBV as well as

helping a friend, but more often unable to confront DGBV affecting themselves. For future workshops there is a need to consider DGBV specifically for LGTBphobia as well as for of same-sex relations.

Table 5. Acquisition of Class specific Competences and Content.

	Mean pre	N	Mean post	N	Variation
I know what are DGBV.	4,92	24	8,33	18	3,41
The Internet and Relationship, Information and Communication Technologies (TRICs) are free of sexism.	1,92	24	2,39	18	0,47
Big technology platforms like Google and Facebook are co-responsible for DGBV.	5,67	24	6,5	18	0,83
I am able to identify DGBV.	6,12	24	7,56	18	1,44
I can tell the difference between different types of DGBV.	3,54	24	7,44	18	3,9
I know how to help a friend who is suffering DGBV.	4,75	24	7,56	18	2,81
I know what to do when I suffer DGBV.	5,96	24	7,72	18	1,76

Table 6 refers to the satisfaction with the workshop. The values show that training on DGBV is useful and necessary to High School students and that the specific session has been well developed by our University students. The excellent scoring of participatory dynamics underlines that our students reached to integrate successfully feminist teaching methodology ([22]) in their workshop.

Table 6. Satisfaction with the Workshop at University.

	Mean	N
I have understood the contents developed.	7,56	18
I have learned new content on DGBV.	7,39	18
The training was useful to me.	7,72	18
The material helped me to understand the contents.	8,06	18
Participatory dynamics have been used.	8,89	18
Overall assessment of the training.	8,56	18

3.4 Written reflections of participating University Students

In their written reflections after the workshop, the University students affirm that their SL experience helped them to improve their competences concerning teamwork, communication and especially speaking in front of a numerous unknown public, moderating and making dialogue others. In this sense, they felt that they put into practice feminist teaching methods, characterised by horizontality and positionality. In addition, they had the impression that being back in High School gave them the possibility to reflect on themselves. The whole experience also felt as a real-life experience and oriented them to take professional choices. They felt that they failed in terms of timing.

In terms of content, the University students felt that they learnt new content, but more important, that they learnt to structure this content and putting it down to earth. They appreciated to work on a real-life issue, which affects them personally and which has interested them independently from our Sociology of Genders course.

Overall, they affirm keenly that participation in SL is much better than any other conventional evaluation activity (e. g. exams or oral presentations) and that this activity enhanced their effort and motivation. They feel grateful that they could impulse a debate and reflection in others and have real-world results and impacts. Two of the participants had very clear to participate, while one of them doubted and participated first reluctantly, though she finally enjoyed the experience. All the three considered the lack of preparation and assessment by the university teachers as well as a lack of time and continuity in school the main flaws.

4   CONCLUSIONS

The quantitative evaluation as well as the University students' reflection made clear that DGBV constitute an important, interesting and new topic. The participants in the SL experience arrived more prepared to the session, as they already formed themselves to prepare the workshop. Instead, we cannot say that they participated more intensively during the session, nor that they affirmed to have learnt more from the workshop given to them than the rest of the matriculated students.

From their written reflection after imparting the workshop at High School we know that the class content helped them to prepare their session at school. However, they felt that the workshop on DGBV they received has been timely too closed to their workshop at the Highschool. In this sense they propose at least one month between the training on DGBV and their workshop at the High School. From their reflection one cannot interpret that they linked their participation in SL to other topics of the course such as feminist research methods ([20], [21]) or feminist teaching methods ([22]). All in all, they complain about a lack of coordination, planning and backing during the SL experience.

From the High School students' evaluations, our observation as well as the students' written reflections we know, that the participation in SL enhanced the University students' competences, especially in terms of communication, including moderating discussions and divulgation of scientific work, as well as teamwork. The University students' written reflection also indicates that competences such as time management as well as reflection and empathy had been put into practice. In this sense, the presented SL experience reaffirms previous research presented above ([29], [31], [30], [32], [33], [34], [35], [36], [37], [38]). For the SL intervention our students clearly amplified their specific knowledge on DGBV.

An often-overviewed aspect concerning the evaluation of SL is the community impact. Here we could proof that the topic of DGBV resulted highly interesting to High School students, that they considered the workshop imparted by University students useful, acquiring new contents and competences. This also reflects the high scores in terms of satisfaction, even higher between non-heterosexuals.

For future SL projects and the continuity of this project it is important to consider also major flaws detected in this project: that is mainly a more intensive accompaniment of the University students by their professors; and that implies that the university acknowledges realistically the work SL projects imply for the staff. This is especially true for inter-institutional projects with a considerable number of working hours for coordination and follow-up.

In addition, we have seen that at first the interest to participate in SL project is not abundant. Having friends who want to participate helped one of the participants to take part of the project. Once our university students finished their project and shared their experience with the rest of their classmates, the majority affirmed that now they would be interested in participating. In this sense, it seems important to us to share the experiences of SL with all the students.

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