
Invisible identities: A critical analysis of intersections of gender, culture and disability in the Maghreb

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Abstract

Women with disabilities face multiple layers of discrimination; they are discriminated against on the basis of their disability as well as of their gender. In addition, women with disabilities constitute a diverse and heterogeneous group – many of them may face additional prejudice and stigma due to their race, ethnicity, sexual preference, age and other aspects of who they are and how they live. This multiple discrimination is explicitly recognized in the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities which in its article 6 obligates State parties to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women.”

This presentation will examine intersections of gender, disability and culture, drawing from 75 interviews with girls and women with disabilities 12-45 years-old, living in urban, suburban and rural settings in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, to identify sociocultural barriers faced by women with disabilities in the Maghreb region and their impact on the enjoyment of basic human rights, particularly the right to social protection and an adequate standard of living. Interviews were conducted in the summer 2015 by interviewers who were themselves women with disabilities, after attending a specific training. With the informed consent of the participants interviews were taped and then fully transcribed and analysed using the software NVivo 10 to support content analysis.

Results show that the intersection of these women’s positionalities entail particular challenges, struggles and expectations that cannot be fully understood as the result of one-directional or cumulative processes of inequality and oppression and should therefore be seen as a new reality that may compound and deepen social exclusion. Yet the narratives collected show also multiple strategies of resistance of these women, which need to be identified and understood in order to renew, deconstruct and reconstruct our knowledge about women with disabilities in the Maghreb.

Keywords: women with disabilities, human rights, Maghreb

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