

*A Guide to MELA:*  
A Serious Game to Combat  
Sexual and Gender-based  
Violence on Agricultural  
Campuses



## Acknowledgments

This guide is produced as part of the program on the sustainability of gender activities attached to Agricultural Transformation Through Stronger Vocational Education (ATTSVE) project, funded by Global Affairs Canada. The Mela project was conducted by S. M. Hani Sadati, a Ph.D. student in Educational Studies at McGill University. Contributions to the guide were also made by Sahar Fazeli, another doctoral candidate in Educational Studies from McGill University. The Mela project team would like to thank all ATTSVE project staff at the In-Country Office, Addis Ababa, and especially Mesele Chane, the in-country manager, and Eleni Negash, the Gender Officer of the ATTSVE.

Special appreciation also to the Gender Focal Persons and Language coordinators in the 4 ATVETs, Maichew, Nedjo, Wolaita Sodo, Woreta, who participated in the interviews, group discussions, workshops and have been invaluable contributors to Mela project. In addition, we are grateful for D5Gamescove group that gathered all hardworking members of the game development team under an umbrella: Kirubel Girma, Dagmawi Bedilu, Elias Shemsu, Mihret Tamrat, Yared Endale, Gelila Nemie, Binyam Wondimagegnehu, and Fillimon Gidey.

Finally, thanks to the sponsors of Mela: ATTSVE project (funded by Global Affairs Canada), IDRC (doctoral award), McGill Faculty of Education (Jackie Kirk fellowship, and Graduate Mobility Award), FRQSC (doctoral award).

*This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.*

*The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors*

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### Recommended Citation:

Sadati, S.M.H. (2019). A Guide to Mela, A Serious Game to Combat Sexual and Gender-based Violence on Agricultural Campuses: Montreal: Participatory Cultures Lab.

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## Section 1: INTRODUCTION

### **What is the goal of this guide?**

From the title, *A Guide to Mela, A Serious Game to Combat Sexual and Gender-based Violence on Agricultural Campuses*, one probably can learn that this guide is about a game that aims to address sexual and gender-based issues in agriculture colleges in Ethiopia. But, still, there might be some questions like, what is a “serious” game? What is Mela? What does the word Mela mean? Why there is a need to create a serious game, specifically to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)? Why was it developed for the agriculture sector? How was the game designed? How one can interact with it? How can it help people to organize various game-related activities? and how it can be helpful for the follow-up activities related to SGBV incidents in the college?

If you are curious to know the answers to these questions or similar ones, there is good news here. This document is meant to take the reader to a journey that starts from the beginning steps into the development process of a serious game, and finally, some follow up activities to address the SGBV in the ATVETs or other contexts.

### **Why is it important to address SGBV in ATVETs?**

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is a global concern affecting the overall well-being of millions of women in the world (Willman & Corman, 2013). Among the countries included in the WHO Multi-Country Study of Violence Against Women, Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of SGBV (Gelaye, et al., 2009). The Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA, 2013) in Ethiopia indicated that 50 to 60% of women experienced GBV in their lifetime. UNFPA (2017) statistics also show that 85% of reported rape survivors are under the age of 18 and over 35% of ever-married women said they had experienced physical, emotional, or sexual violence from their husband or partner.

Specifically, studies show the high prevalence of various SGBV related issues in post-secondary institutions, including rural Agricultural Technical Vocational Education Training (ATVET) colleges (Mitchell & Starr, 2018). In a study conducted in Awassa, Ethiopia, more than one-third of 1 330 female university students had experienced GBV. It is essential to understand that the consequences of SGBV directly affects girls and young women’s professional, social, and individual life and indirectly affects the country’s human development and sustainable development goals.

There is clear evidence that help is needed to address the unique features of ATVETs, which render students particularly vulnerable. For example, many of the students attending the ATVETs come from rural contexts and are thus facing unique cultural challenges in transitioning from rural to non-rural spaces. Further, students attending the ATVETs have exited high school after completing grade ten, so they are often living independently away from home for the first time at the age of 15 and 16. Given the unique competency-based and practice-oriented features of the agricultural

curriculum, students must often travel back and forth to demonstration sites that are difficult to monitor to keep students safe. Chronic underfunding of ATVET institutions results in poor infrastructure for cafeterias, dormitories, and health care, which we know are vital areas for maximizing student safety. There is clearly a need for more up-to-date data on the dropout rate for young women in ATVET Colleges. While there may be many factors, the climate of safety and security is likely to be a key one.

## **Why are agriculture colleges important in the context of combating SGBV?**

Agriculture forms the base of the economy of most East African countries. The most populous landlocked country in the world, Ethiopia, with its 88 million inhabitants, relies on agriculture for 80% of the total employment and 84% of exports.

Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) (2011), states that although various policies and legal measures have been taken at national and international level in response to the prevailing gender inequalities, yet, the gaps between the progress and the need for achieving meaningful results remains to be enormous. Gender Mainstreaming Guideline, published by MoA, shows that the approaches have not been as practical as they should have been. Thus, given the low level of impact that various measures have had, the need for adopting different approaches has become imperative.

Women provide a considerable portion of the agricultural labour in Ethiopia; however, their contributions often go mostly unrecognized, and their access to resources and community participation is restricted. Worse, a large number of women experience physical, emotional or sexual violence. Only half of the girls, who enroll in primary schools, ever make it to grade 5 (USAID, 2019).

Education is a basic human right, and gender equality is fundamental to its full realization. In this regard, the Government of Ethiopia promotes gender equality in and through education to ensure that women and men, female and male students have equal access to learning opportunities, as well as fair treatment in the learning processes, equitable outcomes and advancement in all spheres of life.

So, addressing SGBV, specifically in the agriculture sector in Ethiopia, has a substantial advantage both for equity in the economic, social and political spheres as well as in achieving meaningful and sustainable development results. Obviously, in the Ethiopian context, the link between agriculture development and gender has a more significant implication on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. Women's roles are critical and necessary for all development aspects.

## **Section 2: ABOUT MELA, A SERIOUS GAME**

### **What is the goal of Mela?**

Mela is an Amharic term, which means “Find a Solution.” It aims to be a self-educating tool for agriculture college instructors. By playing this game, Agricultural Technical Vocational Education Training (ATVET) college instructors are supposed to encounter some Sexual and Gender-Based Violence related issues and challenges of their colleges and learn how to manage these challenges and address the problems. In brief, this is a game to teach some of the practical strategies in combating campus-based SGBV to instructors.

### **Why Mela aims to be a self-educating tool for instructors?**

While there may be numerous points of entry for interventions, a promising area regarding sustainability is to build on instructors’ potential role in addressing SGBV. Well-trained instructors can play a significant role in combating SGBV; however, because of various restricting conditions in ATVETs (e.g. long distances from larger institutions and lack of training sessions), it is hard for the instructors to have permanent access to resources, and to get comprehensive, timely, and proper training on SGBV. This problematic condition calls for a new, accessible, and self-educating tool that can support instructors to develop their capacity and be effective in creating a safe and SGBV-free learning environment in their colleges. Consequently, having a contribution to empowering the instructors and expanding their capacity to address SGBV issues in the colleges is the ultimate goal of this game.

### **On the need for strategies and informal approaches to addressing SGBV in tertiary education in Ethiopia**

As has been evident in much of the global research on SGBV in schools and concerning the ‘rape culture’ of universities, learning institutions are often breeding grounds for power imbalances that result in high rates of SGBV. At the same time, there is growing recognition that learning institutions should be places for transformation. Studies show a high prevalence of SGBV in Ethiopian post-secondary institutions and specifically in ATVET colleges. However, despite the increased attention to documenting prevalence rates of SGBV in post-secondary institutions, there has been little attention paid to the issues of SGBV that are specific to ATVET colleges in Ethiopia.

For example, a study among female students of Mizan-Tepi University, which is close to Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, shows that two-thirds of respondents experienced sexual harassment after joining the university. Another survey in Wolaita Sodo University in the southern region of Ethiopia shows that although fear of blame and social stigma still makes female students underreport the experienced SGBV, participants reported five forms of sexual violence actions as highly prevalent. These include (but are not limited to) “attempted and completed rape, physical and verbal harassment, and forced sexual initiations.” Specifically, regarding ATVET colleges, a recent survey shows that Experience of sexual violence, specifically in the form of transactional sex, and cyber violence, puts female students in risky situations.

Regarding intervention programs, however, specifically in Ethiopian post-secondary settings, most studies recommend female empowerment and policy strengthening programs. However, one type of intervention that recently has been gaining attention among educational specialists and especially SGBV scholars globally, is the use of digital game technologies in educational settings.

Newly emerging technological tools like games and simulations, can help to improve learning in an informal atmosphere, not only for students but also for the preparation of the adults and instructors who work with students. So, in this context, serious games sometimes are called Games for Adults.

## **An example**

One of the outstanding examples of these digital games for teachers is a teacher training platform, which is called simSchool. This program is designed in response to the question, “can you learn to teach, or teach more effectively, with a simulation”? (What is simSchool, 2017). The studies that evaluated the effectiveness of this platform show that teachers, who used the simulation, had a “stronger sense of readiness to teach” (Gibson, 2011, p. 65), mostly because they had the opportunity to practice and develop teaching skills with the simulation. These results confirm the possibility of expanding the self-efficacy and competency of teachers by self-educating digital game programs.

## **What is a Serious Game?**

Serious Games usually are digital games that are designed to cause a change in the knowledge, mindset, behaviour, cognitive ability, physical ability, health, or mental wellbeing of the gamer.

The term Serious Games has been coined by Clark Abt (1987), and he defined it as following: “Games may be played seriously or casually. We are concerned with ‘Serious Games’ in the sense that these games have an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose and are not intended to be played primarily for amusement. This does not mean that serious game is not, or should not be, entertaining.”

As Bergeron (2006) observes, serious games might be “the most effective means of safely learning skills and attitudes” (p.68), and there is a considerable amount of evidence that shows learning through games may last longer.

## **What are the differences between pure entertainment games and serious games?**

Games always have entertaining or fun elements. Serious games not only have these elements, but also include two additional parts, one in the content, and one in the process:

- The additional element in the content is a goal or message (educational material - serious content);

- The additional element in the game-making process is the presence of the domain expert(s).

## **What is Mela?**

Mela is a serious game, that has been designed to be a self-educating tool for ATVET instructors. The aim is to create real-life situations for instructors and transfer the knowledge of some strategies that they can use in their classes or on campus to contribute to decreasing the SGBV incidents or increasing gender equality.

## **Learning objectives and game mechanism**

To prepare the educational material (learning objectives) for this serious game, the researcher used multiple methodologies, including interviews, participatory workshops (cellphilm & participatory game design), and small group discussions. Overall, 20 instructors from four ATVET colleges participated in the data collection process. During this process, two main questions were answered by the participants:

1. What are the potential roles of an instructor to address SGBV in ATVET college?
2. What are the barriers that stop instructors from playing those potential roles?

The answers to above questions helped the researcher to prepare the list of roles that instructors can potentially play to address SGBV in the colleges. Among the barriers that instructors mentioned there was a lack of knowledge about SGBV concepts and some specific roles that an instructor can play in the college. Therefore, the learning objectives were designed to raise awareness on some main SGBV concepts and roles that instructors can play to address them.

During this process, about 30 learning objectives were created. Following are some examples:

- To teach instructors how to create awareness in the college regarding females' abilities;
- To raise awareness among instructors about power abuse and the fact that that superiority behaviour can lead to SGBV;
- To teach instructors how to encourage female students to report SGBV incidents;
- To teach instructors how to create awareness on the negative consequences of early marriage;
- To teach instructors how to help female students to take leadership skills;
- To teach instructors how to make the advocacy role in establishing/improving gender-based rules and regulation in the classes;
- To teach instructors how to raise awareness of unplanned pregnancy (prevention, consequences);
- To teach instructors how they can be involved in promoting personal hygiene;
- To show instructors how they can contribute to creating safe spaces for female students;
- To teach instructors how to mainstream gender in their classrooms;
- To teach instructors about cyberviolence and how they can address it in the college;
- To teach instructors how to take advocacy roles for female students;
- To teach instructors about Codes of professional practices regarding gender-based issues;
- To teach instructors how to be an active bystander or promote it in the college;
- To teach instructors about the consequences of transactional sex;



The learning objectives were incorporated into the game, using various scenarios and stories. Five different levels have been designed in the game mechanics, accompanying with an overarching story with about ten characters (5 students and five college staff/instructor). Inside the overarching story, several sub-scenarios in multiple branches have been developed at each level to deliver the learning objectives.

The game's feedback system has been designed to show the players their status and whether they are on the right track or not regarding the decisions that they make during the game. In many sections, the player faces challenging situations that they need to make decisions. This means that the player should select between two or more options that either is related to the professional code of conduct, or personal choice. Also, the game mechanics have been designed in a way that the player's behaviour regarding gender-related issues can affect the student's grades at the end of each semester. In this way, the player can experience the pedagogical benefits of a gender transformative approach to learning.

## **The storyline**

The overarching story in Mela is very realistic. It starts at the beginning of an academic year in an ATVET college. The instructor goes to the class and learns about her/his new students. After running the first class, the instructor gives students an assignment for the next sessions, and the story continues. During different types of academic activities, the instructor faces some situations and needs to decide among a few options. For example, the instructor may learn about a female student who is engaged in transactional sex in the college. Here could be one of the situations that the instructor should decide to intervene or not. Whether the instructor elects to intervene or not, each choice would come with a consequence. By choosing to intervene, the instructor might lose her/his personal relationship with a colleague, but by choosing not to intervene, the instructor closes her/his eyes on an SGBV incident on the campus. As another example, the instructor might observe that female students do not receive the course handouts, and they are always behind in terms of preparing the assignments. The decision that the instructor makes regarding this issue will affect the female student's life as well as her/his professional score!

All the scenarios are based on real situations that come from research interviews as well as previously published documents on SGBV in post-secondary institutions. The scenarios are presented across five chapters/levels. In each level, decisions become more challenging in comparison with the previous chapter/level. At the end of the academic year, the instructor observes the result of his/her decisions in student's grades as well as his/her "professional" or "personal" scores and the number of certificates that he/she can collect.

## **Mela Certificates**

While playing the Mela game, depending on their decisions, a player can get a maximum of 22 certificates in different topics, like "Classroom Organization Certificate," "Active Bystander Certificate," or "Safe Space Advocate Certificate." This is one of the feedback mechanisms that awards players because of their contribution to addressing SGBV issues of their college. In Mela, the player receives a certificate for each gender-responsive behaviour.

## **Educational resources within Mela**

In the bookshelf of the player in the Mela game, there are 30 PDF documents, including research studies, reports, guidelines, toolkits that all are related to gender-based issues, specifically in Ethiopia. The resources have been published by different organizations (including the government of Ethiopia). The player has access to all these documents throughout playing the game. Thus, besides the certificate feedback system, there should be detailed, reliable, and accessible documents for the player if they want to learn more about a specific gender-related topic.

## **How to access Mela?**

Mela will be free and accessible for different types of devices that work under Android or Apple operating systems. Once it is available on the Play Store or Apple store we will announce it on our website ([www.melagame.com](http://www.melagame.com)) or facebook page ([@melagame](#)). If you have any questions regarding having access to the game, please contact the researcher, Hani Sadati ([hani.sadati@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:hani.sadati@mail.mcgill.ca)).

## Section 3: PRODUCING MELA

### The project

Mela was designed in response to a need for a self-educating tool for ATVET college instructors. SGBV has consequences specifically for female students, and instructors are in a position to contribute to addressing these incidents in the colleges. So, through interacting with this game, instructors will be situated in real-life situations and will learn about concepts of SGBV and the strategies that they can use to decrease SGBV issues of their colleges.

### The design team

**Domain expert:** A domain expert brings knowledge about the serious content into the design process. For example, when developing a learning game for schools, teachers take the role of the domain experts since they know what content should be included in the game, and how it should be didactically delivered to the students. For Mela, the domain expert was a doctoral student, who was working with a supervisory committee at McGill University. Their responsibility was to conduct the research, collect data, develop the educational goals and create the pedagogical content of this serious game.

**Game Designer:** A game designer makes the big decisions on game genre, main story, the game's structure, the levels, the feedback system, and the game world. In serious games, they combine educational goals/learning objectives and entertainment parts. Game designers have to cooperate with domain experts to create a meaningful game. (so, the resulting game is both enjoyable and meaningful). In Mela, two Ethiopian game designers were involved in designing the game and creating the game mechanics.

**Story Developer:** The story developer writes the scenarios and stories and helps the game designer. In Mela, two story developers read the documents and the data that came from the domain expert. They created the characters, wrote the scenarios and connected the stories of five levels.

**Artists:** (illustrator and sound developer): They work on the visual and sound aspects of the game.

**Game Developer:** The game developer is the software developer, who covers the technical aspects of creating a game, like programming and coding. The developer basically puts together all other materials that come from other team members (e.g. game designers, artists, etc.).

### Participatory game design

Although there were many specific roles in designing Mela, the most important aspect of its design is that it is based on the participation of ATVET instructors, who provide input across the 4 phases of design.

**Phase 1:** In the first phase of the Mela project, the researcher (Hani Sadati) visited the four ATVETs (Maichew, Nedjo, Wolaita Sodo, Woreta) and interviewed five instructors in each college. He also administrated a one-day Cellphilm workshop in every college for the same instructors, who participated in the interviews. The goal of phase one was to collect data mainly on two topics: a) instructors' potential role in addressing SGBV issues in the colleges and b) their limitations and barriers in fulfilling these potential roles.

**Phase 2:** The second phase of the research included organizing a participatory game design workshop with the participation of ATVET college Gender Focal Persons and Language Focal Coordinators. Most of the participants were the same as phase 1 participants. Fifteen ATVET instructors attended this two-day workshop, learned about educational games, and step by step developed stories that can be used in a digital game, aiming to address SGBV in ATVETs. The ideas that were developed in this workshop was adopted in developing the Mela. The project's game design/development team also assisted in facilitating the workshop.

**Phase 3:** The third phase of the research was designed to develop the prototype and then the actual game. In collaboration with a game development team in Addis Ababa, who came together under the D5gamescon group, the current version of Mela developed in two parts: First, a prototype of a game was created, and after running several prototype-test sessions and collecting feedback, in part two, the actual game was created. Mela has been introduced in several game-test sessions on Montreal and Addis Ababa.

**Phase 4:** It is essential to know how the instructors think about the effectiveness of Mela as an educational tool and receive the final feedback from them. Therefore, phase 4 was dedicated to data/feedback collection specifically from the ATVET instructors. Again, in this phase, most of the participants were the instructors who participated in phase 1 and 2 of the Mela project. The data in this phase came from individual interviews and group discussions that instructors had after playing each level of the game. This data is used to finalize the game and make it as compatible as possible with ATVET settings.

## Section 4: FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

### Using Mela in your ATVET

Mela is a serious game that has been produced to be used by instructors. The creativity about how to use the game in a college can be infinite, but here are some samples of what one can do with this game in a college:

#### Game-Play sessions

Organizing game-play sessions by Gender Clubs regularly (probably two times a year at the beginning of each semester) for instructors. ATTSVE Colleges already have been equipped with tablets and computers.

#### Quiz Nights

Organizing quiz nights on the campus for instructors. These can happen alongside a coffee ceremony or another event. Gender club members can develop some questions out of the game and then organize a quiz night for instructors. During this competition, instructors need to answer the questions by playing the game (maybe just one or two levels). This would be fun and instructional as well.

#### Mela Certificates Competition (How Many Mela Certificates Do You Have?)

During the Mela game, the player has the chance to collect in total 22 certificates, like “Active Bystander,” “Stereotype fighter,” or “Gender Advocate.” However, it is impossible to obtain all certificates in one run. The Gender Club can organize a long-term competition (for example, during a semester) and ask instructors to play with the game and collect the certificates. By the deadline, the winner would be the person who received the highest number of certificates.

#### Game-play sessions for others

If the Gender Club has the budget, they can organize game-play sessions for the broader academic community in their region. For example, they could invite other instructors from other nearby colleges or universities.

#### Creating Activities with Mela Resources

Various types of educational resources have been incorporated inside the Mela game that can be used for follow-up activities:

*Conversations:* Throughout the game, many conversations happen in various scenarios among the game characters. For example, conversations between instructor and student, and instructor and

staff. Some of these conversations that are shown in speech bobbles include instructive information for instructors. These speech bubbles could be adapted and used in Gender Club activities.

*Emails:* The certificates are usually followed by emails that the player receives in their game dashboard. Each email includes detailed information about one important concept that has the potential to increase the player's knowledge or change their attitudes about SGBV. During the five levels of the game, a player has the potential to get 25 emails in their dashboard. Making quizzes using the information that players get in their emails can be an example of a follow-up activity. This can be even organized alongside other informal events also. For example, one of the emails in the game talks about "Power Abuse" in educational institutions and how it causes SGBV against female students. A quiz might be created, asking people about the meaning of power abuse, the statistics around this misconduct, what regulations could govern the staff-student relationships, etc. The answers to these questions are accessible inside the game, but people need to play with the game and find them.

*Resources (as PDF documents):* As it was mentioned earlier, besides the certificate feedback system and the emails that a player receives, there are other resources that are reliable, and accessible for the player (during the game) if they want to learn more about a specific gender-related topic. Gender Clubs could also use these resources for activities such as workshops. Gender clubs can choose each of the resources and present a summary of them for instructors or students on different occasions.

## **Playing Mela on the wall!**

Here is another style of playing Mela, which can turn into an activity:

*Screen (or project) and Play:* There is a great deal of SGBV related information inside Mela. One person might miss all the information if they do not pay enough attention. Therefore, one of the activities could be projecting the game on a wall or screen where several people can see it at once. Although this is a single-player game, people can play it together. This means that they can proceed in the game and wherever they need to make decisions, or wherever they face a new concept, they can discuss and share their ideas about it. For example, one of the emails in the game talks about "Gender-Based Proverbs" or stereotypes in society, and its harmful effects. At this point, players can think of what the other gender-based proverbs or stereotypes are and how they can lead to SGBV in society or at the campus.

## **Using Mela in other contexts**

Mela was designed with the idea of addressing with instructors the issue of SGBV on ATVET campuses in Ethiopia, and it involved many ATVET instructors in its production. However, the game could have many other applications:

*Students in ATVETs:* Although the game has been designed for ATVET instructors, it can also be helpful to make it accessible to the students as well. By playing the game, students can learn about

the main concepts of SGBV, specifically from the instructor's viewpoint. They also can learn about the instructor's responsibilities and student's rights regarding SGBV issues on the campus. Learning about their rights gives the students (specially females) more self-confidence or courage to follow-up on the potential incidents that might happen to them.

*Instructors in TVETS focusing on areas other than agriculture:* Mela also can be useful for other TVET colleges. Most of the learning objectives in Mela and most of the scenarios that have been created based on the learning objectives are applicable to other college settings. Therefore, Mela can be a self-educating tool also for other TVET instructors.

*University instructors across Ethiopia:* Literature review shows that universities across Ethiopia are dealing with many of the same SGBV-related issues on their campuses. A few of the Addis Ababa University professors already have played the Mela, and they think that it can be a useful instructional tool for universities as well.

*In other areas of Sub-Saharan Africa:* Literature reviews highlight that many of the same issues of SGBV in post-secondary institutions exist across the region. It can be seen as an educational tool for the educational institutions of the whole region.

## **Last words...**

We are delighted to see that Mela finally has been turned into reality and is not just an idea. Developing the game took about nine months. During the whole process, the main goal was to make an educational tool that could contribute to capacity building for college instructors and at the same time, could be engaging and participatory. We are happy to see that Mela was born and is growing every day. More feedback and comments would help it to mature more in the right way. While we consider this section just as the last words for this guide, but it is 'just the start' for more discussions and sharing on how to improve Mela to make it a stronger tool to combat SGBV.

## About the Author

S. M. Hani Sadati is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, McGill University. His doctoral project, Participatory Digital Game Development to Address Sexual and Gender-based Violence in ATVET Colleges in Ethiopia, is attached to the [Participatory Cultures Lab](#). This project is conducted under the supervision of Professor Claudia Mitchell and the co-supervision of Dr. Lisa Trimble with Dr. Lindsay Duncan and Mrs. Angeliqe Mannella. Hani's background is in Social Science (BA), and Women Studies (MA) and his research interests include educational studies, game-based learning/gamification, women and gender studies, sexual health and HIV/AIDS, anthropology of health and illness, and participatory methodology. Hani is the Co-founder and Coordinator of the [Games and Gamification for Human Development & Well-being \(GHDW\)](#) Working Group as part of the [McGill Institute for Human Development and Well-being](#).



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