

Abstract

This thesis examines women's embodied experiences of pain and discomfort during gynecological examinations which has been an underprioritized topic within ethnographic and sociological research on women's reproductive and sexual health. Most ethnographic studies on this topic have focused on women who suffer from pathological conditions in their genitalia or on racialized violence in reproductive healthcare. This study contributes to ethnographic research on women's experiences of pain and discomfort during gynecological examinations by focusing on women who in biomedical terms are considered to have "healthy bodies". It questions the routine practices within gynecology including doctor/patient interactions at local hospitals in Prague, Czech Republic. Through in-depth interviews with women in Prague and participant observation at two gynecological wards, the study demonstrates how lack of emotional care and gentleness from gynecological practitioners and the design of gynecological equipment contributes to a normalization of pain and discomfort in relation to gynecological examinations in a European context. The study argues that allowance of unnecessary suffering in gynecological practice is an expression of structural violence against the female body in medicine. Consequently, this means that women refrain from seeking medical advice on reproductive and sexual health issues and that they stay away from gynecological check-ups. To decrease pain and discomfort in relation to gynecological examinations, the study suggests improvements in gynecological practice through more attention to emotional care, better designed gynecological equipment and prioritization of communication skills in medical training.