

YFEM SAFE-SPACES AND WELLNESS SESSIONS



2020



A report on sessions held in 2020

Young Feminist Safe-Spaces and Wellness Sessions

The Feminist Safe-Spaces and Wellness Sessions were an initiative implemented by the Young Feminist Movement as a means to strengthen young women and girls while creating a safe space for them as well as an effective platform for idea sharing and cooperation. Thus far two sessions have been held with the sole purpose of getting participants to engage with the facilitators and to get an idea of the event. All the events were truly a success.

This initiative aims to solve socialization problems that are significant among women in the Namibian community as well as to play a constructive role within the feminist movement.

Gender based violence

A major problem that has been met with insufficient aid is that of domestic violence, a lot of women have, unfortunately been left locked up with their abusers, and with the domestic violence cases sky rocketing during this time [mainly violence against women], it became clear that a lot of women needed a safe space. Abusive homes and situations are often a complex and highly sensitive issue to deal with and safe and secure spaces, as well as a sense of familiarity and support from other women, these sessions aim to solve that situation.

Feminist activism at grass-root level

Additionally it became a platform in which feminist activism at the grass-root level could be discussed and planned out. The core focus being how to assist several feminist initiatives at a foundational level, as well as to point out the different and unique problems that women have been facing during the COVID-19 pandemic and in general. One means in which this is achieved is through constructive debates on subjects that affect women such as abortion and culturally diminutive practices such as limitations to education access mainly in rural and remote areas.

Mental Health and Wellness

The networking sessions incorporated mental health and wellness in order to make sure everyone attending is allowed to have therapeutic release and comfort. This aspect is a method meant to empower the women through release of certain harmful behaviour and socialized inhibitors such as blaming oneself for abusive situations.

Report for Y-Fem first meeting Saturday 13 June 2020

The first meeting was a success involving a lot of networking within a diverse group of women. It was divided into three sessions discussing mental health and wellness, the concept of power and a innovative ways to move forward as feminists. We began with a wellness session, within which the women were taught how to deal with negative thought patterns that can be harmful as well as tips on how to build self esteem.

Next was a discussion on understanding the concept of power led by Irene. During this discussion, the attendees got an understanding of how one can distinguish between having power over, power within and power under, and how these dynamics can adversely affect women.



This creative session included an interactive application of the lesson learnt through a physical portrayal of the three forms of power that women are faced with in their daily lives. The follow images depict a portrayal of one woman having power within a situation. While this particular group demonstrated this through a human model, the others gave their views and understandings as well as commentaries and relation to the situations.



The session was followed by a productive introduction in looking at innovative ways in which feminist organisations can effectively help women in the Khomas region and create a greater impact in society. The main focus of this particular session was to gain perspective of the specific areas that the women present were interested in focusing on.

The session ended with a brief meet and greet along with a small meal followed by a collection of reviews of the entire event from the participants who were still present.

Reviews

The reviews provided were anonymous to allow participants to speak as freely and openly as possible. Each respondent was asked to provide; what they liked **(A)**, what can be improved **(B)** and what was new to them **(C)**.

Respondent 1

- (A) "The love I got here, I learnt a lot. Now I can speak out. I LOVE IT.
- (B) "More ladies. We should never stop this.
- (C) "Saw new faces, but everything went well."

Respondent 2

- (A) "The talk from the first talk was a reinforcement to accept things you cannot change and not feel guilty for choosing 'YOU' over someone else. Beautiful arrangement for women to be who they are and not live life to please people."
"Realising that I am actually a feminist empowered me to be a leader and speak out for what is really worth fighting for and not brush things off or being ignorant because of what people might say or think of you. Everyone was outspoken made this event go smoothly. "
- (B) "Well done event was awesome."

"One more thing, maybe start on time next time. Example- if the plan is to start at around 12h00 pm, say meet by 11:30."
- (C) "Learning about feminism, was honestly ignorant about the whole topic in general."

Respondent 3

- (A) "Seeing new faces. The talks we had, which I wanted for it happened. You all so good."
- (B) "More people. Table in the middle."
- (C) "The topics."

Respondent 4

- (A) "Well I've never done something like this before, but actually it was fun and very educating at most."
- (B) "Not sure what didn't work for me cos I enjoyed it all."
- (C) "Well most of the time I hate talking in public or a room with more than five people, I don't know, but well, today I did that...(Confidence). I loved this."

Respondent 5

- (A) "Learnt more about mental health."
"Learnt to be around other people and new people."
- (B) "To network with more people."

(C) "Learning more about feminism."

Respondent 6

(A) "I feel very revived, the sessions have been very educational and informative. I networked with the women and it was euphoric. The space was safe and very welcoming."

(B) "Everything was good."

(C) "I am expecting everything great. I am looking forward to the next session."



Y-Fem Trust Report for Saturday 20 June 2020 Feminist Networking Session

The second meeting for the women's meeting was successful and was met with little difficulty aside from the issue of time keeping. The meeting consisted of three main sections; a socializing game session, a strategy session and a wellness session.



The socializing and gaming session was a casual means to get to know one another, particularly to make sure the new people attending were comfortable and were aware that it was a safe space. This time was additionally created to solve the time delay issue pointed out by those who attended during the week prior.

The wellness session involved a discussion around maladaptive coping mechanisms that people commonly adopt and how to avoid them. This mainly focused on

the ideals of feminist psychoanalyst, Karen Horney.

Finally was a session to discuss how best to move forward as feminists operating at grassroots levels. Focusing mainly on how Covid-19 had really been harmful to women, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, sexual-reproductive health rights, as well as mental and economic well being.

Reviews

We reached out to the participants after the session to obtain an overview of their experience and if they recommend any changes. The following are responses from participants who managed to get back to us with some feedback:

Respondent 1: “I enjoyed it and found it fulfilling, I just still have a problem with the time keeping”

Respondent 2: “I had fun, there’s not much I can say and I would like more content for us young girls”

Respondent 3: “It was a lovely session, perhaps if it was a little more interactive, but otherwise I enjoyed it”

Respondent 4: “Fun Session, I liked it”

Respondent 5: “This was a very interesting experience for me, I enjoyed meeting new people and the games we played at the beginning were a lot of fun. Although, I did think we started a bit later and some things were a little bit rushed, but I had fun.”

Respondent 6: “All was well. We need definite time to start and ending together”

Respondent 7: “I liked everything we discussed, maybe to touch a little bit on time, I feel like we need to be a little bit more punctual, or we started a little late on the 20th, otherwise all is well and I’m looking forward to our next meeting”

Feminists safe space 29 August 2020

Session 1

The first session was led by YFEM advocacy intern Vimbainashe Makanza. This wellness session was mainly focused on mental health first aid wherein one considers their mental health with the same urgency they would address their physical health and take steps to care for mental health that one may equate to eating well and exercising to maintain the physical health.

She discussed the following steps:

- Paying attention to emotional pain
- Redirecting your gut reaction when you fail.
- Monitor and protect your self-esteem
- Disrupting negative thoughts with positive action.
- Finding meaning in loss.
- Don't let excessive guilt linger
- Learn what emotional wounds and treatments work for you

During the discussion participants learnt that loss is part of life and is unavoidable. For example when one loses a spouse, one may adapt positively to this loss by thinking of how one would build a relationship with their children.

Additionally, through the exploration of excessive guilt, we explored scenarios in which one may not have been their best self or for whatever reason treated someone unkindly, as it is possible for us to be villains in other people's stories. The following were pointed out as important steps to amend a relationship that may have ended because of one's misdeeds;

- Apologize empathetically
 - Explain how what you did affected the next person.
 - It's never too late to apologize.
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- Take notes frequently of what happened that week.
 - Sometime it's possible for you to be wrong.

- Try to be more sensitive to the next person.
- Try to put yourself in the person shoes.

The participants stated the following as means in which they relax and deal with low moments in their lives. Some participants had highlighted that they did not know exactly what activities to engage in, therefore this exercise was done as a method to exchange ideas on how to disrupt negative thoughts with positive actions,

- Read a book or listen to music (Preferably those that make you happier not ones that reinforce the sadness)
- Look at yourself in a mirror, and repeat positive affirmations, what I say is that I am blessed no matter what people say or what is happening in my life.
- I am greatly inspired by people that have a story to tell. It makes you feel good when you listen to these people. It helps me remember that there are more people going through what I am going through, I am never alone and their success stories make me believe that there is hope.
- Sometimes people want to throw their garbage on you, you need to identify this garbage and leave it. Not that littering is okay, but do not be their bin, do not let people's negativity become part of you that is what I remind myself.
- A lot of people are very open with their struggles, take your time to deal with yours, do not feel pressured by another person's comfortability, but if you find you're comfortable enough to vent and talk about it, go ahead and vent to the people you trust or to a licensed therapist.
- I find it calming to speak to kids, they give me so much joy

On the notion of confronting loved ones who have mistreated an individual in a practical sense, one participant asked the following question;

What if your boyfriend tells you that he is getting back to the ex-girlfriend however he still treats you as if he still wants to be with you?

Alongside the mental health first aid steps, these were additional factors discussed by the participants;

- Don't take the first word listen to the action.
- For sensitive people we always have to take care of our emotions.
- Look at the persons body language.
- Communicate how you feel
- Let your boundaries be your guide, if cheating is your turn of let it be.
- So many African women, stay in marriage with 10 step kids because of the boundaries that they didn't make.

Session 2

The second session was led by Irene and it was centered on the concept of Feminism.

Religion

Particularly with how a lot of people pick out the Christian bible verse that talks about women submitting.

Capitalism

It tells us whatever is in this world must be owned by someone, which has given a lot of sexist men a false sense of ownership over their supposed female subordinates.

Education

We are told what to do and what not to do. A lot of African educational systems decide or determine how girls and boys should behave through activities they are to be a part of, e.g. girl scouts or classed they can be a part of such as fashion ad fabrics or woodwork. Although there have been massive improvements in the formal aspect which lacks such restrictions, it is now a matter of educators who misdirect with the basis of traditional gender roles students or parents and guardians who do so and reinforce these ideas at home.

Government

For example laws that the government put toward our ovaries.

This can be seen through the use of police officers to enforce the law using arbitrary methods or with the unwarranted use of violence.

Where does it come from?

Feminism was described as a reaction to patriarchal systems, as a rejection of those systems and how they have been harmful to people in society.

It is essential to identify how culture, government and society in general employ this system in order to know exactly what aspects of the systems we are a part of make us uncomfortable.

The participants listed the following as sources of patriarchal unfairness:

Furthermore it is important to know the difference between equality and equity.

1. Equality is giving people the same things.
2. Equity is fairness in every situation.

Patriarchy is a system that been performed without equality and equity.

The session ended with some art therapy in which participants painted images of the ideal world they would like to live in.

YFEM Otjiwarongo Session with new Young Feminists

Introduction

The session began promptly at 15:00 on the 26th of September with an introductory session by the director of YFEM, Florence Khaxas discussing the goals of YFEM with the Otjiwarongo girls. Alongside Irene, the two explained the concept of feminism and how age old concepts such as patriarchy and how they have led to systemic inequalities and toxic masculinity. This was done through an exploration of informal rules and expectations that exist within society. The following are some of the rules and expectations identified;

Girls

- Be kind and respectful
- Only speak when spoken to
- Close your legs
- Dress modestly (Below knee length skirts and generally covering up)

Boys

- Be the head of the house
- Be tough
- Don't cry

The sources of these expectations were found to be areas one interacts with regularly, such as the school, church, friends and family. The discussion included a breakdown of perceived social barriers to success such as gender, race, age and ethnicity. Through this analysis of social rules and expectations vis a vis how often they are exposed to an individual on a daily basis, the girls identified with the goals of the movement as well as the goals of YFEM.

Session 1

The first session was led by YFEM's advocacy intern, Vimbainashe Clara Makanza. During this particular session the girls were being introduced to a main concept and internal goal of YFEM which is that of honing a powerful voice in young women. A powerful was identified as one that incorporates how one interacts with oneself as

well as the community one is a part of. In doing so, three main aspects were explored, namely;

a) Acceptance

- This involves allowing a person to be themselves without judgement. As long as there is no harm inflicted upon another person, to have a powerful voice involves this mainly in the practice of self-acceptance, and there is strength or power reflected when one shows this to others.

b) Open-minded

This involves being willing to learn and to be considerate of other people's views, additionally, to make an active effort to understand that which one does not understand. This sort of care must be accorded to oneself, as well as society, being open to learning and considering that one may be corrected is a reflection of power and once one considers such possibilities as points of growth rather than shame, there will be a notable improvement in how one relates to peers and how one reflects.

c) Support

This was considered to mainly involve the act of being encouraging and providing emotional aid. Power in this aspect was identified through the empathy and care involved in the incorporation of this.

As an aspect of YFEM's continuous effort to learn and understand the context of the Otjiwarongo girls and young women, a question was posed; *Is there a way in which you feel your local society fails to provide these three core aspects for you, and are there means in which you feel these may be provided for?* The participants identified occasionally feelings of having fear of being themselves, isolation, neglect and rejection. They identified the following as needs they would like to be met; funded camps, a helping hand for the poor and support groups.¹

Another factor explored in this discussion was that of the need to know ones rights. In this aspect it was seen that knowing one's rights is an important aspect of one's self-care and building one's esteem as they learn to stand up for themselves. It was also pointed out by one of the participants that this is important because,

¹ Highlighted because the participants placed a great deal of emphasis on this point

“...sometimes people are subjected to abuse because they don’t know that what they are going through is wrong.”

With regards to the infringement of rights in their community, they identified the following;

- Insufficient penalties for rapists
- Local authorities doubting or underestimating female leadership
- Occasional insufficient execution and implementation of government policies
- Police responses could be better

The session ended with a short rock, paper scissors tournament to illustrate the three aspects of open-mindedness, acceptance and support.

Session 2

This session was led by YFEM intern. Theopolina, who mainly focused on how anger builds up in a workspace or working environment, and how they may be dealt with at their different stages. This discussion was meant to prepare the young women for instances in which conflict might arise as they begin to work together in the region.

It was a fruitful session in which the girls learnt the need to listen and understand one another’s perspectives and try to find a workable compromise whenever there is conflict.

The facilitator started off the session with a song by John Legend, *if you are out there*.

The discussion began with a venture towards explaining conflict resolution wherein participants were also contributing on how they understand conflict resolution.



Conflict can be resolved when it's at stage one, two and three. Once it escalates to stage four it becomes difficult to solve it.

Conflict there arises from so many things within our communities and it is our responsibility to understand that we solve it at an earlier stage.

One of the most effective ways is by understanding other people's views and perspective.

This was made through a demonstration where the group was divided into four groups and tasked to stand in different positions, a poster with number three was placed in front of the participant and they had to explain what letter or number or object they see from their different angles.

This illustration was to explain how societies view women and girls from different angles hence it is for us to bring this society to come view what we see from our point. At the end of the session all the participants were task to draw images of what they would like to see in the world.

This was followed by a relaxing and well needed yoga session led by Julia as well as an interesting tarot reading session which the ladies reportedly thought was a lot of fun.

Reviews

At the end of the session we received feedback from some of the participants who stated the following;

“I learnt a lot in a way that I should be open minded, being accepted and supportive in a community or people next to me.”

“I really liked the session today, the best part is, I have noticed that women really do care about each other. Thank you.”

“In today’s session I learnt a lot. It taught me a lot of things, like everyone can be a leader and bring a change into lives of young women and girls.”

“In today’s session, I learnt a lot. I never thought I could be a leader or anything. This will surely change something in my life, I will be the voice of the future generation of women and girls.”

“Today’s session was okay, actually, I came late, however what I got was useful, I learnt about conflict resolution, freedom of speech, which was powerful because I hardly express myself. I think programmes like this will help us to learn from one another’s mistakes and learn more about our rights.”

Images for Otjiwarongo Session



Figure 1: Florence Khaxas explaining the core goals of YFEM and the feminist movement in Namibia



Figure 2: A very exciting and invigorating tarot reading led by Julia



Figure 3: A relaxing yoga session led by Julia



Figure 4: Otjiwarongo team officially receiving stationary to start their work

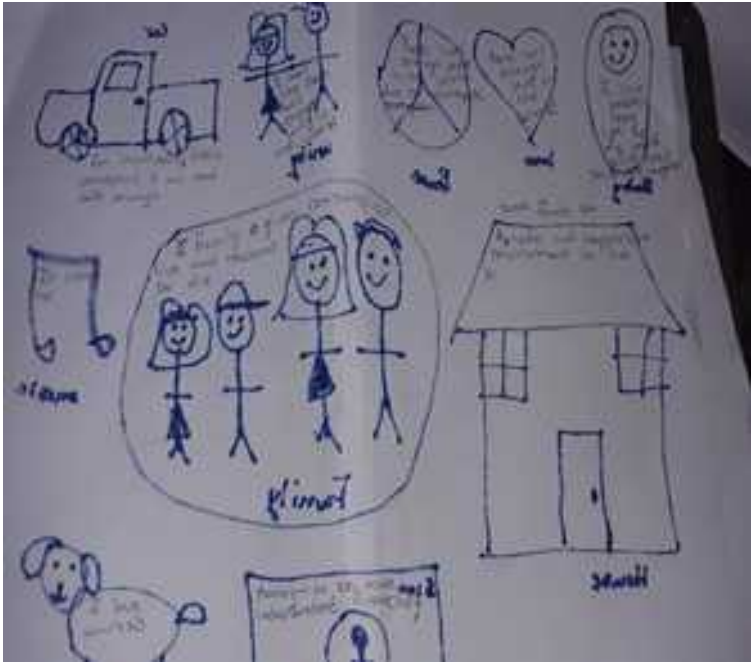


Figure 5: One of the images shared during Session 2