

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights advocacy in Universities: 2018

Introduction



Figure 1 SRHR training at KIU



Figure 2 SRHR training at Makerere University



Figure 3 SRHR training at Kyambogo University

With support from Comic Relief, MEMPROW has sustained its advocacy for young women's increased access and utilization of SRHR information and services to University students through trainings. In its fourth year of the SRHR advocacy, the training focused on the following topics;

- ❖ Personal empowerment
- ❖ Goal Setting
- ❖ My body, My Health, My responsibility
- ❖ Patriarchy and sexuality
- ❖ The state and sexual politics in the African context
- ❖ VAW/Girls
- ❖ Healthy Living

This report provides a summary of the sessions.

Personal Empowerment by Ms. Mildred Apenyo



The personal empowerment session involved various issues that included outlook on life, personal ability, emotional control, body politics and knowledge about society, all of which are beneficial to effective decision making and handling of young women's challenges in general. The young women got to reflect on their lives which they put together as a tree (the tree of life). They were able to mirror on their values, achievements, weaknesses, dreams, hopes, desires and dreams and in what manner they can achieve these dreams and the negative things that they needed to let go in order to live meaningful lives. This is a moment of self-analysis mixed with excitement and sorrow. Participants get to celebrate their achievements and struggles and are trained on how they can always overcome challenges and conquer their dreams and hopes.

During the sessions, the facilitator used the illustration of a master's house to enable young women understand the manifestations of patriarchy and ways in which they can deliberately claim their personal power. The discussion on beauty politics portrayed how the demands that girls and women regulate and control their bodies and appearance have escalated to new, challenging levels.

The facilitator further clarified the concepts of feminism, consent, self-confidence, gender based violence, body and shame. The session that is usually full of positive and liberating energy allows participants to celebrate their achievements and weaknesses, to learn how to voice their opinions and position themselves, as well as building perspective and confidence by taking ownership of their lives.

Violence against Women/Girls by Ms. Tina Musuya/ Ms. Diana Kagere



It is important for the young women to understand how violence manifests itself. MEMPROW's involvement with young women has revealed that many young women pay attention to physical violence but are reluctant with other forms of violence. Because of this, many have been exploited especially by their intimate partners.

Some of the facts that came out of this discussion included;

- ✚ Violence happens across the world and to many women. 1 in 6 women experiences at least one form of violence
- ✚ A woman can experience all the forms of violence in one phase
- ✚ Most likely when one form of violence happens, others are in the pipeline
- ✚ Never decide for a survivor. One should only give options but not to tell the survivor what to do. Let the survivor own her decision.

Participants got to know the forms, effects and most importantly the cycle of violence. They were urged to be aware of this cycle and know when to break it. In addition, the young women were equipped with information on legal frameworks to enable them be in position to exercise agency in case they are faced with violent situations and better still provide support to the survivors.

Goal setting by Ms. Hazra Okem



The facilitator used her own life experience to pass on information to the young women and to enable them understand that when one sets herself to achieve a goal and remain focused, she will realize positive results. She explained goal setting as a powerful process for thinking about one's ideal future, and for motivating one to turn her vision of this future into reality. The most important point to note was that *"Goal setting is much more than simply saying i want something to happen. Unless you clearly define what you want and understand why you want it, your chances of success are considerably reduced"*.

The tools of goal setting were described using the acronym of RUMBAS. To understand this better, the young women were tasked to write down their own goals putting into consideration RUMBAS. They were helped to set clear and well defined goals and were encouraged to always refer to them to avoid being diverted.

The State and Sexual Politics in the African Context by Mr. Richard Mugisha





The session tackled many important issues relating the power that social systems such as government, family and religion have over sexuality. The discussion is aimed at defying social and cultural standards break paradigms and promote critical thinking. The need to talk about sexuality in the African context and break the stigma or the taboo aspect of it had a particular highlight throughout the sessions. The session unveiled how society supported by the state influence women's sexuality from the day they are born citing family as the major organizing factor. Most of the participants faced contradictory thoughts and feelings about topics such as violence and respect related to dress code, sexuality in an older age, equality between husband and wife where both must share chores and be accountable, as well as many others.

The young women were able to understand that patriarchy is not about men per say but it is a system. It is a system of male domination and female submission. Domination is about masculinity and submission is about femininity. Masculinity is about all those who have power and not man only because a woman with money in a big position can act muscular. The young women realised that they had power to challenge the status quo. The facilitator conducted the sessions brilliantly keeping all the participants motivated and comfortable about discussing such contentious issues.

My Body, My Health, My Responsibility by Dr. Judith Ajeani

Dr. Judith Ajeani, a gynecologist/obstetrician took the participants through a more technical learning journey on health (what it means to be healthy and why should we seek living a healthy life), sexual reproductive rights, menstrual cycle, early pregnancy, family planning and contraceptive methods, STD's and UTI's, HIV, fistulas, as well as breast cancer prevention. Participants were curious, intrigued and most of them asked lots of questions, getting the chance to unlearn certain myths

about pregnancy and family planning as well as properly understand how to better prevent from sexually transmitted diseases and defend their rights. Some of the questions that the young women asked during the session portrayed that the SRHR information is very fundamental. Some of the questions included;



- ✚ What causes severe vomiting and diarrhea during the menstruation?
- ✚ What causes fibroids?
- ✚ I was told I have fibroids but after I gave birth they disappeared. What could have happened?
- ✚ If I have unprotected sex one day before my periods, can I get pregnant
- ✚ What are some of the pills that cause barrenness?
- ✚ What are ovarian cists and what causes them?
- ✚ What causes a bloody discharge when it is not yet time for menstruation?
- ✚ Is it true that short ladies always have birth by caesarian?
- ✚ How can an HIV+ mother give birth to a safe baby?
- ✚ How long can an HIV+ baby stay if not treated?
- ✚ If a girl aborts several times, can't the body get used to miscarriages that she may loose the baby even when she wants it?
- ✚ Is it true that one breeds for six weeks when approaching menopause?
- ✚ Is it true that some fibroids are caused by abortion?
- ✚ What causes breeding in pregnant women
- ✚ Is there first aid for fibroids?
- ✚ I used to menstruate heavily for five to six days but afterwards t reduced to three and the blood is very little but the cramps have continued. Is it caused by hormonal imbalance?

- ✚ How long does it take for a woman to menstruate again after giving birth?
- ✚ Is epitomic pregnancy caused by having sex during menstruation
- ✚ Is it bad to work during menstruation?
- ✚ If the in plant is put in the arm, then how does it connect with the reproductive system?
- ✚ Where does a penis stop when having sex

Topic: Patriarchy and Sexuality by Prof. Sylvia Tamale



The facilitator provided the young women with information on how patriarchy manifests itself. She helped them understand how various stereotypes are adopted and how they keep women in subordinate positions and re-enforce male dominance, patriarchy as a system creates and recreates the system of domination based on race, sex, class, religion, tribalism e.t.c. the discussion further tackled the link between gender roles and behavior and how they sustain patriarchy. Understanding the context of patriarchy and capitalism and how they work as Siamese twins generated critical thinking.

The discussion on sexuality enabled the young women to understand that sexuality is socially and not biologically constructed and society uses it to deliberately keep women in a subordinate position and perpetuate inequality. By controlling and regulating women's sexuality, patriarchy and capitalism are given oxygen.

The concept of unlearning and relearning was greatly emphasized in the sessions. However, the young women were not encouraged to throw away all the knowledge but

to always be critical to the underlying assumptions, to start seeing the world through new lenses, to stop thinking that what they have been exposed to is the global truth, to start questioning, to stop generalizing, and to use their intellect.

Health Living by Ms. Ife Piankhi / Ms. Sarah Nakame

Health living means both physical and mental health; unfortunately many young women do not pay attention to their bodies and think that life is valueless. They adopt a tendency of following everyone's opinion and advice and in the end become resentful, highly critical and judgmental to themselves. It was noted that most of the girls did not make through a basic healthy daily routine. Their diets are imbalanced mainly composed by junk foods, skipping meals for classes or leisure time (sleeping longer hours), they rarely find time for exercising and highly get rushed and stressed by their responsibilities at University.

They young women feel their minds with negativity, they worry about the future most of the times, they blame others for their problems and sometimes do not express their views and feelings openly. This session was therefore meant to give healthy tips to the young women to promote both physical and emotional wellbeing. It increased awareness on the basic needs and habits of living a healthy life in order to increase their potential.

"Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food" what you eat is what you are because it will determine your state of illness or wellness" was emphasized.

Topic: Peer pressure by Ms. Hazra Okem

This session focused on understanding peer pressure especially negative peer pressure that affects them as young women. Through discussing and sharing stories of how the young women have been pressured to do certain things in the past and the negative consequences that came about as a result of giving in to negative peer pressure, the young women recognized the current trends/ tactics their colleagues use to lure them into bad habits. However they admitted that resisting is still challenge for them.

Some of the pressures that the young women mentioned include;

- ❖ Pressure to abort
- ❖ Pressure to have sugar daddies
- ❖ Pressure to change their dress code
- ❖ Pressure to plait certain hair styles
- ❖ To use drugs like “kuba” especially athletes

The discussion brought out cases of sexual abuse especially from lectures and the use of drugs to gain confidence and enhance performance both physical and mental. On this note, MEMPROW organised a dialogue on sexual violence at Kampala international University (KIU). The University was selected because the participants of the SRHR training were more open to this discussion than in other universities.

Basing on the above, the need for SRHR information is there and it's great in universities. The lack of choices in reproductive health means that the young women are at a great risk, and cannot achieve their potential in education and a broad range of opportunities.

Appendix1

