

A Celebration of Women and Mental Health Awareness

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On 23 August 2024, women gathered at the Tshepo Temba centre at Etwatwa, East Benoni, to celebrate themselves and indulge in conversations about mental health. The theme of the event was green, gold and white; these colours represent faith and power, representing the strength and resilience women have in society. During the celebrations, women were sipping and painting. Each participant was given an empty canvas, a paint brush, a glass of juice and snacks. They were given instructions to paint whatever came to their mind.

Lucia Mnguni, who is a social worker from social development, gave a brief introduction about her work, which caters for community members who suffers from mental health illnesses. Lindiwe from Central Health details the different kinds of mental health illnesses that people suffer from; one of the examples she talked about was, "Intellectual disability" which affects the brain. She further explained that children with this disability attend special schools and this is caused by low blood pressure or if the mother had accidents during pregnancy such as falling or bumping herself. It can also be caused by Immunosuppression overdose, she added.

Lindiwe also highlights that mental health comes with these following signs: poor memory, stress, depression and anxiety. For diagnosis people must go the clinic or hospital for an assessment. She then broadly explained what causes depression and unpacked signs of depression for those who may miss the symptoms and methods one can use to prevent depression.

Women engaged in conversations about depression and the stigma associated with. According to research conducted by William Gumede from Wits University, "The shame which many South Africans, particularly black communities, place on people who live with mental illnesses are preventing sufferers from seeking help", he also highlighted that this has led to the belief that amongst black families mental illness does not exist, and this belief is widespread throughout South Africa.

Sometimes being a woman in this patriarchal world can cause extreme stress on its own, because of many responsibilities and pressure of how they should live their lives.

Sister Tshwanelo (56) from Unjani clinic was as a guest speaker, she spoke about available medication to help control depression; but she doesn't think this is a suitable solution because it is important to deal with the root cause of the problem. Giving medication to depression patients also increases the stigma, she said. She touched on how it is easy for society to point fingers at those who stigmatise, and no one is taking care of the person giving the stigma because it comes from a place of self-conflict. She closed off her speech by touching on pregnancy and how important it is to plan pregnancies to ensure a healthy upbringing which will therefore decrease stress and stigmatisation.

After all these conversations, women shared their stories behind their paintings and how difficult their live journeys have been.

Phumzile Malinga (40) from Etwatwa mentioned how women are expected to carry all the work at home on their shoulders and how they are treated as slaves. “At some point a group of men will come to your house to put a price tag on your value and deem you less worthy if you have no education or you have children. Women are stereotyped on a daily basis, so it is important to come back to yourself as a woman and find out who and what you are without a man. You cannot pour from an empty cup,” continued Phumzile.

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