

Midwives of SA you are
midwives of disabled women
and their children too!

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Disability?

- 15% of the world population is disabled
- 80% of persons with disabilities live in developing countries.
- More than half of them are women.

(WHO, 2011)

What is disability?

“...persons with disabilities include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006, article 1): .

What is disability?

The World Health Organization (2011) does not regard disability as a health problem which is on a person's body, but rather as an outcome of the way in which society is organized to marginalize people who have bodily impairments.

Why Disabled Women?



Why disabled women?

- Disabled women form one of the most marginalized minority groups in the world.
- Disability is experienced differently on the grounds of gender.

Myths

- Disabled women are asexual beings...
- Disabled women are innocent of sexual thoughts, feelings and experiences...
- Disabled women are genderless beings...
- Disabled women cannot be mothers...

Result of myths

- Denied the right to “sexual intimacy, love, marriage, motherhood and personal fulfilment” (Boylan, 1991, p. 23),
- Reality: No human being is asexual, sexuality forms a core part of being human (Gomez, 2012)
- Intersectional persons; sexuality, class, poverty, gender, culture, religion

Culture and Religion

Intersection of femininity, sexuality, culture and religion

Culture & Religion

- Children with albinism – mothers have sex with a White man or a ghost (Haihambo & Lightfoot, 2010).
- Spirits, witchcraft and breaking of traditional taboos
- Traditional healers and religious prophets

Traditional healers and religious prophets

- Prescription – sex with disabled women

- Epilepsy

- HIV

- Enables men to get rich

(Peta, 2017)

Traditional Healers and Religious Prophets

Prescription - Examples

Prescription - Religious Prophets

- *He said the “holy” oil he uses to heal can only work if it is applied to his penis and then put in my body through my vagina, because the oil has to go to the mouth of the uterus) and he can only do it through his penis. So he puts the oil on his penis, then he puts his penis in my vagina and he says that is the healing for mental disability. I told my family about the treatment method and they said I have to do it, if I want to get well because the prophet takes instructions from God).*

Prescription - Traditional Healers

“The traditional healer said my ancestors had told him that he should have sex with me so that I can get healed of mental disability...I told my family about this treatment and they said its Ok! I must do it because the traditional healer has the power to speak to my ancestors”

Prescription – Traditional Healers

- *When my husband left, a lot of men wanted to have sex with me. I think they were trying to get all these things that a traditional healer promises, because these men know that I have a mental disability.*

What does it all mean?

- Sexual abuse
- Deaf women
- Blind women
- Intellectual disability – lack of sex education – vocabulary to describe the abuse
- Choice

What does it all mean?

Sexual abuse perpetuates into marginalization in:

- STI/HIV programs
- Sexual and reproductive health programs
- Health care centers (mid-wives)
- Lack of services and information in appropriate formats such as sign language for Deaf women and Braille for blind women.

Where is the Justice Delivery System?

- *If I am raped it's hard to report. The police cannot talk sign language. Some of my Deaf friends, both the mother and the child are raped, but the police are not talking sign language and there is no interpreter so we just keep quiet (Chipo, Deaf).*

Voiceless in communities



So what does it all mean for mid-wives?

Providing quality care in midwifery...

Woman 1 - Albinism

...when I went to deliver my first baby I didn't know how the baby was going to come out of my body. I was thinking that maybe a hole will open on my stomach and the baby will come out through that hole. I just didn't know a lot of things, because my mother was not telling me...she hates me because I am disabled...the mid-wife shouted at me "why were you getting pregnant, did you not see that you have albinism"

Woman 2 - Deaf

All my babies died because the doctors and mid-wives could not speak sign language. I lost a baby girl in a rural hospital, I was trying to talk to them but they could not hear. In the city my big baby boy also died during delivery. I could read the mid-wives' lips and I saw that one of them was saying push! push! push! but for me to tell them anything, I couldn't because they could not understand sign language...I think they are not taught in their school how to speak sign language, so they are not educated.

Woman 3 - Deaf

If I deliver a baby no one tells me how to care of it, mid-wives are just angry that I am Deaf and having a baby. They think I have evil spirits because I am disabled - they teach me nothing...I go home, there is no one to teach me, my father and mother died of AIDS. The babies of some of my Deaf friends have died because no one teaches them to take care of the baby...I was lucky because at the clinic one of them had two Deaf children so she helped me to deliver my baby, but she did not tell me how to take care of it, but I am happy that I figured it all out on my own.

Woman 4 – Physical disability

When I delivered my disabled child...the mid-wives called each other from all corners of the clinic to say, "Come and see this funny thing that is here". His legs were not straight; they were bent like this (going to the back and touching his back). I said God what is this? God, now people think I have more evil spirits...they did not tell me what to do with the disabled child..." (Tsitsi polio induced physical disability-HIV positive)

Woman 4 – Physical disability (continued)

“I wanted to steal another woman’s child and leave my disabled child or to kill my own child when I leave the hospital...the midwives treated me badly I was afraid of myself, afraid of my child and afraid of the people in the village...I just kept my child until he was ten years old and the disabled people organization came to help me...” (Tsitsi polio induced physical disability-HIV positive)

Woman 5 – Physical disability

We are very busy here, why were you getting pregnant did you not know that you are disabled, now we don't even know what to do with you, don't just open your legs for men, you give us a headache here...we are busy mid-wives, no one has time to deal with your disabilities, get on that bed so we see what's going on with you.

Disability literacy

- Midwives of South Africa you are midwives of disabled women and their children too!
- Sensitivity to disability
- Disability literacy
- Embrace disability

Back to pre-colonial times???

Disabled children were dealt with in three ways:

- they would be killed, be assigned to a traditional healer for treatment
- be hidden somewhere within the family sphere.
- In Tanzania people who have albinism continue to be mutilated or killed for ritual purposes (Masanja, 2015)

Questions & Way Forward

Thank you