

A report by the **South West Activists Network**



**Young Women Speak Out!**

*Change is in Your hands*

### **Contributors**

Martha Chauke- Human rights advice office  
Rapule Moiloa- BMF monitor  
Kamogelo Seleka- Social justice  
Tumi Mthombeni- Thusang morwalo advice centre  
Tholakele - VEC Dobsenville  
Constable Mbali Ntobong- SAPS  
Thamie Mokoena- SANCO  
Khabonina Mnguni- West Rand community advice centre.  
Derrick Nyundu – Life Line South Africa

The South West Activists Network is an open platform of activists in Soweto, Kagiso and other townships south of Johannesburg

Our goal is raise the voices of activists and communities who work to create a life free off poverty inequality, crime and all forms of injustice to men and women, young and old, residents and visitors

Like our Face Book Page

<https://www.facebook.com/South-West-Activists-Network>

We are grateful for the inspiration and ongoing support of Ubumbano Voice App. Visit the site here

<https://ubumbanovoice.com>

Activists in the South West Activists Network, talked with young women in townships of the south west Johannesburg over August to November 2019

Young women were asked to say what challenges they faced as young women living in the townships.

Young women talked about how poverty and unemployment affected them, the difficulties of finding work or creating their own business.

While they pointed to not having money and resources as a problem, they also talked about the how the disrespect and pressure within families, from teachers and friends. They say that they are pushed in directions that lead to destruction in their life.

They said they are not safe, even in their own backyards from violent attacks. Often this is fuelled by alcohol and drugs. Mostly , it arises from the traditional attitude of men, which is that that women are their properties and they can do whatever they want with them.

These conditions makes young women very unsafe. They are easily pressured or mislead into unsafe sex. Pregnancy at an early age is a big a crisis in the township. Worse still, many young women contract HIV because young men resist using condoms.



## Poverty and unemployment the root causes of our problems

*Poverty and unemployment is a major factor that undermines young women.*

*When families are not able to provide the basics young women are left to search for financial support.*

### No money for the basics

*"Poverty plays a big role, it makes us young women, want to escape it to survive it even it means selling our souls. We have no idea what human dignity is , dignity is foreign to us."*

*"We have no money for even the basic stuff such as sanitary pads"*

*"Many young women are forced to assist their parents, especially when the father is not present, to look after their siblings, to provide food, school uniforms and other needed things"*

### Boyfriends with money and older men

*"Many of us rely on our boyfriends with money for basic things. Some continue toxic relationships simply because the man can provide for their needs"*

“Young women date older men, because they are not working and they say at least they will be taken care of”

“A man buys a woman drinks at a tavern or even buy them food. Then they think that they are already dating and that the woman is his property”

### Jobs for sex

“A lot of time when women are looking for work there must be an exchange for sex for a woman to be employed. The pressure is great because the unemployment rate is very high.”

“It is hard to get a job if you don’t know someone. If that someone is a man, then he proposes sex.”

“After grade 12 I did an administration course at a college. Due to a lack of work I had to go and work as a domestic. I heard that our municipality has a post for admin. I applied and was called for an interview. A man called me saying I should come to his office. He told me that there is “nothing for mahala”, its rather a “table interview” or that I pay R2500. I pleaded saying I wont sleep for work . Please wait for me to get paid so that I will pay you. The guy refused and insisted on sex. At first I was tempted, but then I refused. I did not want to lose my dignity and suffer the danger of sexual diseases.”

### Fake Marriages

“Women in our township link up with foreign nationals. Foreign nationals take advantage of the woman’s state of poverty. To get residence papers , they ask them to marry them and they promise them that they will give them an amount of R400 per month. This fake marriage means that the women cannot apply for a child support grant. use them to get permits. They marry them and then pay them a small amount of money. This

### Prostitution

“Many young women end up in prostitution, even staying with an older man for regular payments is a form of prostitution”

“Out of 100% it's only 25 % of young women who support their kids with the little grants they receive to buy food, clothes and the necessity’s for the kids. Many of these women end in prostitution because of unemployment. And for some if only they can get money to buy booze to forget their problems and yes she stated that dating older men it makes it better to get what they need such as clothes, toiletries and other stuff”

“She said that unemployment pushes or drives young women in to prostitution in around Diepkloof to either get drugs, alcohol and other needs, many women end up being victim's because of unemployment”.

## The problem of setting up a small business

“Women try hard to get an income through small business activities. But it is hard, most times they fail”

“Women find it difficult to set up their own small business. They get no support from government”

“Even if one starts a small business of selling at a street corner, the JMPD (city police) will be there to harass people who are trying to build something for themselves. They have their possessions taken from them. If the government could protect and respect the rights of people selling in the street corners and pavements, then many people would create employment for themselves.

## The poverty trap

“Poverty is more than just a lack of income or not working. Lack of resources causes one to think passively, includes shame and limited access to education.”

“Our parents can hardly afford money for us to go to school. We end spend weekends in the taverns. We sleep with different men in exchange for alcohol and money. We end up contracting diseases and having children we cannot support.

## Failure of the education system

“We are all made to believe that education is the key by our parents and the government but in reality that's not true, you go to school waste +-15yrs with the hope that when you finished school you'll be employed and you'll take care of yourself, after graduation you become excited and say I won, I have the key with me, but when you go knock on the door, the door slams on your face and the world is looking up to you to excel but how do you excel when you have a key that doesn't open the door in front of you? You become frustrated in the sense that Boom you choose a short cut that takes you to the deep end which is drugs just to shift your focus and think it's an easy way. You don't have anymore answers to your peers because they dropped out from school but you kept going until to the last bit (graduation) they still say the same thing that "you thought you were better than us but look now as you educated but we are in same WhatsApp group" we all not working despite the fact that you are a University graduate we drink together we might as well look out for Blesser (sugar daddy) to buy us alcohol and drugs we feed our cravings in exchange for sex.”



## Pressure in the Family, From Friends and Education institutions.

*Many young women talked about the pressure on them in their personal life experiences, family and friends that builds stress in their lives. Young women appear to struggle with the loss of identity.*

### Family Pressures

“Absent Father issues. Growing up without a Father tends to make us look for our Fathers in the men we date. And mostly it is men that will repeat the cycle from their upbringing / background in getting involved with men that leave them too and they have to raise the children on their own.”

“Then there is pressure from families we come from that we make something of ourselves and taking care of their children and leaving home to maintain their households”

“There is pressure from the family for us to get married forcing you to end up staying in abusive relationships”.

“There is pressure to keep up with statuses, whether parents can afford it or not, pressure to date certain types of guys in order to keep up with statuses.

### Lack of information and personal confidence

“Some young women lack of ambition due to lack of information. They have limited information. They don’t open their minds to the possibilities that await them out there.”

“ The lack of self-confidence has made a lot of them fall victim to falling pregnant at young ages, old men take advantage of their vulnerability and family situations.”

“According to what I've seen and chats I've had, broken families and underprivileged homes contribute somewhat to peer pressure effects, young women all want to feel like they are worth it and unfortunately for most they are taught to find their worth in things and not self. Self-identity isn't even a concept to many of these young women, family doesn't encourage them to be proud of their being, society only escalates the damage that is mostly created from the home space’.

### The problem of identity

“Okay there is a lot facing young African woman nje!

Identity- no one seem to really know who they must be these days cause the are so many types of persona that you as a person allowed to be these days.

Culture- now days it's okay not to follow your culture but follow the fake distractive one instead of our true African cultures.

Searching- too many looking for love, looking for peace, some are looking for their biological bloodline so they can find purpose. Running- away from responsibility, from self and many are running away from their true calling.”

### The pressure of the social media

“Lack of tangible role models; the unlimited and uninterrupted exposure to media is crazy. The media is controlled and so is the audience. We are exposed to one kind/type of role models, not very much options. Education/information is not fashionable enough.”

### Pressure on students from poor families

University students in Braamfontein spoke about their problems

“She said Braamfontein is mainly schools and universities, most of the young woman they from poor families and parents can't afford anything. They here to get education and they lucky to get scholarships or bursaries. She said there is peer pressure and competition While others they can afford to buy those expensive clothes and phones there are others who can't and they really feel the pressure. In order for them to have those things they end up dating older man (blessers). She told me that though they get what they want but there is nothing for free

She continue saying that they take them out, introduce them to alcohol or even drugs, buying them food ...”

### Search for Escape

The pressures of life with little support leads to young women searching for ways to get rid of the pain.

“Quick fix, we want things and we want them now and that has caused us to be lazy, all thanks to media sensationalizing everything. Good honest living seems to be boring, everything is about what people think peers’

“Alcohol, “ukugrover”/ nice time is more important”

“Even when we get educated it's not for us, but it's about "living the life" get a job buy a town house a car and hanging with your own” .

“A lot of us young women get into drug usage to let go of the pain we carry. Our actions are sad and irresponsible especially when there are children we need to take care of”

“Unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse seems to be the one destroying our youth. In this kasi there are so many young women who are not working and as a result they feel bored. When weekend comes they will go out and meet some guys who buy them alcohol. The problem is that they will walk alone late night drunk as a result they exposed themselves to the danger of been raped or killed”

### Suicide

The pressure the young women faces pushes them in the direction of suicide

“ This young lady told me that the challenge they have is teenage suicide, teenage pregnancy, girls dating older man. She continues so explain that the hunger for success, studies, peer pressure and cyber bullying lead to many young woman having depression. She said many of them they have attempted suicide, others have suicidal thought and few of them the succeed



## Early Pregnancy and HIV

*Having a child at a young age is a major problem for you women. Young women experience a lot of pressure from boyfriends and older men for unprotected sex. They do not appear strong enough to resist this pressure. The result is that their education comes to an end, they have greater financial burdens and risk STI's and HIV.*

### Education alone does not help

“Despite teachings at school that has to do with life skills to make young woman to choose a better way of living, many young women still get caught in a situation that they are promised money by their boyfriends to only sleep with them and don't use protection.”

“The department of education has introduced life skills in schools as part of the curriculum, the department of health and other organizations has been involved in educating young woman about safe sex, condom use, STI's and pregnancy. Despite that effort young women drop out of schools because they are pregnant. Some young as 15-16 years reported the father of their babies they are the same age while some said they have older boy friends”

### Double Blow

“The worst part is that they leave school because they are very shy and their partners continue with their education while the sitting at home. You lucky if you only get pregnant in some is a double blow because they find out they are HIV positive”

### Self Control

“ The hurting part is these young woman know what must be done but because someone has uttered the word money then everything stops, they forget what was taught in class for life skills goes together with self-control or self-discipline and if none of these will be remembered in the heat of the moment that's when many of the young woman find themselves in a situation that is uncalled for and become parents at an early age.”

### Drop Out of School

“Many of the young woman end dropping out from school because of they are ashamed to be seen pregnant at that age although self-discipline is there but it depends on how is used to be able to safe guard themselves from being teen mother's as well as single parents at that age and end up giving up school, having low self-esteem and depressed because of the situation that they are now single parents and teen's, think that there are no more opportunities for them because they are drop outs, one mistake that many of the parents don't do is to be talk with these young woman so that what they learn or taught at school should build inside and that self-discipline should be released from within.”



## Gender Based Violence

*By far the biggest problem that women face is the violence of men.*

### Patriarchy

“Most young women in townships are victims of patriarchy (the belief that men are the superior and must be obeyed ) Men always have an upper hand and subconsciously they assume or feel they should settle for the lower hand.

### Male low self esteem

But when they are not in charge, they become angry.

“My husband is jealous because I run a small business. He sees this as an insult to him. He calls me names, says I am stupid. But if I don't do anything he still calls me stupid. Even when they , my kids find jobs, they are stupid, The problem is that he is cheating and does not provide for the family”

### Verbal and Emotional Abuse

“The personal challenges that I face is verbal abusive in my relationship, I am verbally, emotionally abused by someone I trusted that he will protect, love, respect and honour me no matter the situation.”

“Effects of Domestic Violence in young women: Many of them suffer from psychosomatic illnesses and devastating mental problems like post-traumatic stress disorder. They find it difficult to function in their daily lives. I remember a young woman that I interviewed at the place of safety for child and women abuse, she mentioned that it is so difficult for her to sleep without taking tablets because she constantly has nightmares, always jumpy when she hears the bang sounds. She isolated herself from friends and family members because she feels that they always judge her and take decisions for her. she feels worthless and always in bed.”

### Breakdown in trust in relationships

“As a single unemployed parent who is doing everything in her power to raise her kids, it is hard to trust anyone these days be it in a relationship or even looking for work as men in high positions take advantage of the troubled women looking for work because whoever conducting the interview may take advantage of the situation.

“ I am afraid of committing herself in a relationship as I am afraid of what may happen to my kids and safety for my kids is very important.”

### Lack of respect for women

“Women faces difficult challenges daily. Women lives a critical life daily no matter age, height, strength, power, money or no money none the less a women should be respected, loved, protected and appreciated. Women are targets of most men in an abusive relationship she is not valued, respected, and many end up killed because of love by boyfriends, husband's even relative's.

### No safety for women

“There’s no safety for women regardless where they are be it at home inside the house with doors locked because anything can happen and most women kill men to protect themselves. If a woman is raped men says is because she exposed her body that’s why she was raped and that men think they own a women's body.”

### No safety for children

A your woman, 29 years. she is fearful because our environment its cruel, she mention that even in our yards we can be raped. When a child is playing and you do not see her ,were scared because even a neighbour is not trusted anymore”

## Dress and Male Hypocrisy

“Men can move around with a short and a vest but if it's a woman wearing in that manner negative words will be uttered that draws attention. She stated that she also lost a friend killed by her husband on their 10th anniversary, lack of safety, urgent reaction to women's cry.”

“And the way women dresses does not say she is looking for sex or wants to be raped. These does not say men can do as they want with women, those who raped are given a bail and no one thinks about the victim i sometimes ask myself if there's justice in this country or even laws of these country who do they protect because looking at GBV is committed daily against women and children no one talks about women problems in homesteads.”

## Alcohol Abuse and Violence

“Alcohol abuse has become a fashionable thing in our communities and that always creates a problem where by many young women are raped and some of the young women are found dead after being raped thrown in fields or wherever.”

## Failure of the Justice System

“You could see anger on her face before she started talking. She said in their kasi they are scared for their lives and don't feel safe. She said the abuse of woman and children is so rife in their area and the justice system fails them and when they report cases of abuse the perpetrators will be walking the streets the following day. She said they even lost trust in the police because it seems like they don't care about victims of GBV”

“And some young woman are being hunted by the ex-boyfriend with a weapon, there's no safety for them although they may have opened a case for abuse or applied for a protection order but that it's not enough because injustice is what they face because the law is always on the perpetrators side no matter the type of institutions hence many of the victims are afraid to speak because they fear for their lives.”

“She mentioned that she experienced her first domestic relationship at the age of 6, When his father constantly physically abused her mother in her present she cried she was also assaulted by him. She tried all the avenues, case was opened and protect order but the perpetrator was not arrested, these are the main reasons when victims had lost hope in the criminal justice system and they feel helpless and depressed.”

## So Where to Now

## What do we Do

The South West Activists Network will be holding a *Young Women Speak Out Workshop* in Soweto towards the last week in January 2020.

We will ask Young Women say What they are prepared to do to make the township safe for you women and what support do they need.

We hope that in this workshop we will come with with innovative ideas action.

Follow our Face Book page for more details

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Maya Angelou

