

Putting women's health on the nation's agenda

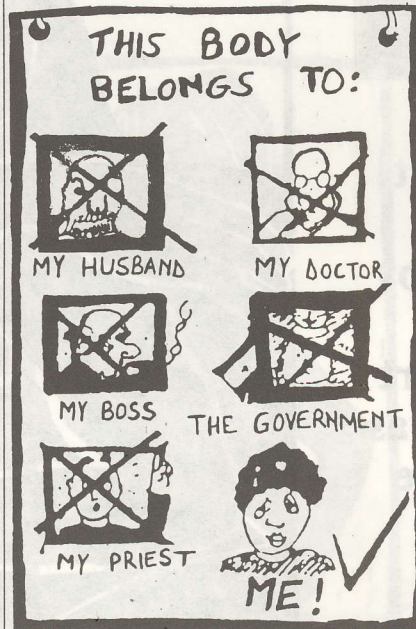
The manner in which health is experienced and dealt with by women, men and children in our communities is a gender issue says the Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS), which is based in Kenya.

CAFS's objectives are to inform and educate people on health issues. They say that women's specific health needs remain uncared for because the health of everyone else in the community tends to be channeled through the woman as child bearer and mother.

At a recent Women and Health seminar which was jointly organised by CAFS and NANAWO (Namibia National Women's Organisation), the participants agreed that it was mostly women who were responsible for the collective well-being of the family and community, and this responsibility most often lead to the neglect of their own health.

The seminar brought together representatives of various women's groups and the Ministry of Health and Social Services to discuss topics such as violence and its effect on mental health, women and the environment, women and AIDS, substance abuse, and the role of traditional healers in Namibia.

The participants felt that the



seminar provided a necessary platform for women to identify their specific health needs. The seminar also highlighted practical ways in which these needs can be taken up by people in their communities and by health workers.

One way in which this can be done was by making health a public issue. Health should not only be the responsibility of women and people involved in the health profession only, but should become a collective effort the women urged.

Women's groups concluded that they will make an effort to work out strategies by which women can influence health policies.

The lack of community

health care facilities was also discussed by the participants, and the Ministry of Health and Social Services explained that its policy was to focus on preventative health care rather than curative care.

In pre-independent Namibia the focus was on the more expensive curative approach to health causing poor people to be greatly excluded from services, the Ministry said. To shift this focus was part of a whole process of introducing the community-based health care approach which included the setting up of primary health care centres in villages, they added.

Health care should not only involve doctors and hospitals, the Ministry said. It exists in a close relationship with the way in which communities are organised. It is therefore not only the responsibility of doctors, nurses and mothers, but also that of teachers, ministers, community workers, and fathers.

DICTIONARY

urged: Seriously encouraged.

facilities: Equipment and resources needed to do something.

preventative: To stop something from happening.

curative: Able to heal.