

WOMEN ON THE MOVE

Mamiki Ntswane is the co-ordinator of the Community Psychiatric Service at the Katutura hospital in Windhoek. Her job involves giving advice and in-service training to nurses throughout the country who work with people that have a history of mental illness, and following up patients with regard to their medication and rehabilitation.

Mamiki was born and grew up in South Africa. She came to Namibia in 1976 to take up a position as a psychiatric nurse in Katutura. Mamiki did her basic nurses training. While studying in the early 1970's, she was supported by her family. Mamiki considers herself lucky in this regard as both her father and mother insisted that the daughters in the family further their education.

"Education will liberate you from your husband," was something her father frequently said to her. This attitude towards women was indeed exceptional in the shanty town slum area of Brakpan where Mamiki grew up, and where few of her woman friends even gained their standard six.

After completing her basic nursing diploma, Mamiki went on to do midwifery at an Anglican mission hospital in the northern Transvaal. Here she won an award for the best student and this enabled her to study psychiatric nursing.

During this time Mamiki had given birth to her son and was forced by community and family pressure into a marriage which soon ended in divorce. As it was traditionally accepted that the first born child is looked after by the grandmother, Mamiki was able to further her studies in psychiatric nursing.

"My intentions were to work hard so that I could build a home for myself and my son. As the situation was working well at my family home, I decided to save up my money and invest it in further studies."

From 1979 to 1983 Mamiki completed a B.Cur from the University of the North. "It was hard work, but it was worthwhile." In 1986 Mamiki took up position as co-ordinator of community psychiatric nursing. At present she is completing her honours degree in psychology through Unisa.



"My future plans are to work as a tutor in community psychiatric nursing and encourage the formation of a wider base for psychiatric services in the community. I want to encourage an awareness of mental illness so that cases can be identified in time and treated. The aim is to prevent the admission to psychiatric institutions which leave people with the stigma of being labeled as 'mad'.

"The community needs to be drawn into the healing process of patients rather than patients being isolated in institutions away from the community."

"What strengthened me at times when I felt I could not go on: The support of good women friends and family members."

*Onthou: 8 Maart is:
Internasionale Vroue Dag.
Remember: 8 March is:
International Women's Day.*