



AT THE CROSSROAD
OF INEQUALITIES /
DISCRIMINATION

PRACTICAL
EXERCISE

Her story – Zakie

Group size:

2–3 participants

Duration:

45–60 min (5 minutes for instructions, 20 minutes for working in small groups, 20–35 minutes for the discussion)

Requisites for the practical exercise:

- printed worksheet for each group
- pen and pad
- larger sheet of paper and coloured pens
- time measuring device (watch, stopwatch, mobile phone, etc.)

Type of practical exercise:

work in small groups

Methods used:

reading, empathising with another's story, discussion in small group, group reflection, group work

What is the purpose of this practical exercise? What does the youth worker want to achieve? What results can they expect?

The aim of the practical exercise *Her Story – Zakie* is to help participants understand the different characteristics/circumstances and identities of the protagonist through the real story of Zakie Hosseini. Through work in small groups and group reflection, participants will realise that identities are intertwined and that some characteristics/circumstances reinforce others. Through a real-life story, participants will learn that personal characteristics/circumstances intersect with each other in intersectional discrimination, thus creating a new reality, which is not the sum of individual personal characteristics/circumstances, but rather a specific situation that arose as a result of the interaction of personal characteristics/circumstances and associated discriminations.

The story used is part of the publication Her Stories. Bazafkan Homa et al. Ljubljana, Humanitas – Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation, 2019. Available at: https://sloga-platform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Njene-zgodbe_WEB.pdf



Practical exercise plan

- Before the practical exercise, print out the worksheet. Prepare pens and pads. Prepare a large sheet of paper and coloured pens for group reflection.
- Split the participants into groups of two or three. Each group should have its own worksheet and its own pen.
- Give the following instructions to the participants: Work takes place in small groups. First, each member of the group reads Zakie's story silently (*reading takes about 8 minutes*). After all group members have read the text, discuss the different characteristics/circumstances and identities of the main character within the group and complete the worksheet.
- Spend at least 20 minutes working in groups.
- Invite the participants to a group discussion. You can guide the discussion using the questions below. Make sure that all participants who want to give their opinion have the opportunity to do so. Remind participants that all opinions are welcome and that opinions may differ.
- Summarise the main findings and write them down on a large sheet of paper. If you wish, you can use the same layout as the one on the worksheet (table).



Questions for the discussion

1. *Were you able to identify with Zakie at least a bit? Why yes/no?*
2. *Which part of the story shocked you, positively surprised you, disappointed you, or angered you the most?*
3. *Was Zakie the target of any stereotypes or prejudices? Which ones?*
4. *What are the identities that have caused Zakie to experience discrimination? In what way?*
5. *Does one of her personal characteristics/circumstances reinforce/marginalise another?*
6. *Would Zakie's story be different if one of her characteristics/circumstances or her identity had changed? Why yes/no?*
7. *What did you learn in this practical exercise? What did you realise? How will you use the acquired knowledge in your everyday life?*



Advice for the youth worker

- *“Life is a stage displaying our story and we, the protagonists, get to perform different roles from birth to old age. As many people, as much stories. And not just a single story. People are a treasury of different stories written by life. Yet this same life often denies us possibilities and opportunities for our stories to be really heard and understood. Therefore, as the play of our life is unfolding, our decisions and acts often become subject to interpretation of individual observers, which leads to misinterpretations and subjects us to the mercy of stereotypes and prejudice for the society to easily sort us in different compartments.” (From the Preface of Her Stories collection)*
- The practical exercise can be carried out indoors or outdoors. When outdoors, make sure there are as few distractions as possible (noise, weather conditions, etc.).
- If necessary, provide a pad for writing on the sheet for the participants (if no flat surfaces are available (tables, floor, etc.)).
- The discussion questions listed are for assistance and guidance only. We encourage you to add your own, and especially to respond to participants' comments.
- The practical exercise is designed for one school period. If possible, we recommend that you spend two school periods for this exercise. Allow extra time for in-depth discussion.
- The practical exercise can also be adapted for individual work. In this case, each participant should receive their own copy of the worksheet with the story.

Some examples of filled out fields in the table:

GENDER:

- ZAKIE'S IDENTITY/CHARACTERISTIC/CIRCUMSTANCE: *Female*
- DISCRIMINATION, DIFFICULT LIFE, PREJUDICES, STEREOTYPES: *single mother; it is more difficult to take care of the family; parents wanted sons, because they are strong, while daughters are weak; the husband has the final say in all matters*

NATIONALITY:

- ZAKIE'S IDENTITY/CHARACTERISTIC/CIRCUMSTANCE: *Afghan*
- DISCRIMINATION, DIFFICULT LIFE, PREJUDICES, STEREOTYPES: *as an Afghan woman in Iran, she was in constant fear of deportation; she had to renew her residence permit; she was not allowed to compete or go to the pool at school; she is a foreigner in Austria*

- Participants might not fill in all the fields in the table. This can be an opportunity for them to question why they did or did not perceive something. You can also encourage participants to compare notes with each other.
- The practical exercise is also an opportunity for the participants to discover some of their unconscious biases.
- You can also adapt the practical exercise by analysing one of the other stories from the *Her Stories* collection (available at: https://sloga-platform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Njene-zgodbe_WEB.pdf). *Her Stories* is a collection of personal stories of women who, for various reasons, left their homelands and created a new life among us. At first glance, we can say that the common thread of all the stories is the migrant and/or refugee experience. However, if we listen to them, we realise that these women are much more than just migrants and/or refugees and that there is much more that connects them. To each other and to us.

Her story – Zakie

- Before you is a worksheet with the true story of Zakie Hosseini.
- First, read the full story carefully.

Resisting patriarchy – Self-made woman

My name is Zakie Hosseini, aged 32. I am a single mother of three children and have been living in Austria for six years. Currently I am based in Innsbruck. My parents are from Afghanistan, but I was born and raised in the city of Mashhad (the second largest city in Iran). My family had fled their home country because of the constant war in Afghanistan, which has been going on since the 20th century.

Identity

As an Afghan in Iran one is always afraid of being thrown out of the country, due to the lack of secured residency rights. You need to get your stay prolonged over and over again. As an Afghan at school I could not go to the swimming pool or take part in any kind of competitions. I hated my Afghan identity. I never liked being (considered as) an Afghan, as there was always the difference between us and them (Iranians). Our family just lived in Iran, a hard life as a poor family.

Sorting out nuts

I grew up in a big family: we are seven sisters and three brothers. My parents always wanted to have boys, as they were considered 'strong' in comparison to 'weak' girls. That is why there is ten of us, children. (...) My father was considered as the breadwinner of the family: he worked as an imam (a religious leader in a Muslim community), but still his salary did not respond to the needs of our family. So we, the children, had to work from morning till evening, besides going to school, to secure the family's survival. Our work included producing handmade dolls and separating pistachios and walnuts to sell them at the market later on. These earnings helped us cover the expenses for our education.

Relationships

I married at the age of fifteen. At that time my father was very sick. He couldn't work anymore and stayed at home. My mother used to say: "Why should girls learn? They need to marry anyways. We are not rich and I will not be able to send any of them to university." I was actually quite good at school, I received only As, but still I seemed to be a burden to my family. For me, marriage was not only an obligation, but also something to help my family have a better life. Personally, I just wanted to escape the hardships of my situation.

My father chose a man who was ten years older than me, from a reasonable, but poor family. The father of my future husband was also an imam, like my father, which reassured me that they were a good family.

Motherhood

Just after my marriage and before turning sixteen, I gave birth to my first girl. We both cried out of different reasons at the same time. I did not know what to do with here. I had not known how to prevent pregnancy. My mother had never explained anything about contraception. She was always involved in taking care of my siblings, every two years she gave birth to a new child. Nowadays, I think that you should not get pregnant as a teenager, but instead enjoy life as young person.

Non-communication

As my husband was much older than me, I felt that he was the grown up and I was the child next to him. We did not get along with each other and I think that his family had (like my family) arranged the marriage for him. I felt that he was not satisfied with our marriage. I wanted to love him, but I had no feelings for him. He never spoke to me, actually, we never spoke to each other. Maybe he felt that I was not able to understand him, but for sure neither of us felt comfortable in our given situation. I just stayed with him at his family's house, because it would have been too shameful to get divorced. My mother also explained to me that a divorce was not possible for me, as she had so many children to take care of and she would not have been able to support me financially. So, in Iran I never thought about ending my marriage and stayed with my husband for eight years.

Unsteadiness

At some point my husband said that he would go to Europe. Although he had not had any money. My husband was poor and he didn't earn enough money for any 'extras', like a refrigerator or a vacuum cleaner or dresses for family weddings, which made me always stay away from these kinds of celebrations. He simply never bought us anything. He believed that as long as he could get us something to eat, he performed his family duties well enough. Despite the lack of money, he still managed to leave us with a small amount of monetary budget before fleeing to Europe. Left alone in Iran, I figured out how to survive on my own. I was lucky to find a job in a bakery, although I didn't have a formal working permission, due to my Afghan nationality. But these circumstances did not prevent me from working. After a while my husband contacted me from Greece and explained that his money had been stolen by a smuggler. He asked me for financial support. I was very upset and frustrated at that time, but I had no choice than to help him out. I sent him the requested amount. (...) After some time he got in touch with me again, explaining that he had received a positive answer for his asylum application in Austria and he wanted us to join him. I actually didn't want to move to Austria and was definitely not ready to live with him again. (...) I asked my mother for advice and she insisted that I

should follow him to Europe. She said: "If you don't join him, imagine the gossip from the relatives and other people!"

Fighting and travelling

I repeatedly threatened my husband that if I came to Austria, I would apply for divorce, but he did not take me seriously, as manhood is often related to having the last word in discussions. (...) In the end, we decided to follow him to Europe. He borrowed 1000 Euros from a friend and bought us plane tickets to join him in Austria. (...) Finally there, and with the help of my German teacher, as I could not fill in the form for the court on my own, my German skills were not advanced yet, I managed to get divorced on consensual decision. It did not take long; within a year I was divorced. The only problem was that my husband did not want to pay enough alimony for our children. He even wanted to be reimbursed for the airplane tickets from Iran to Austria that he bought for us. Thus, I accepted his request. (...) It would not be possible to get divorced in Iran. Firstly, my mother never supported my longing for separation, scaring me with the idea that my children would be taken away in case of a divorce. Secondly, a divorce cannot happen without the man's approval.

At home, but missing trust

At present in Innsbruck, I am well-off. Except, sometimes information and opportunities for single mothers are not easy to figure out. I think that an organization for single mothers, especially foreign single mothers is missing in Austria. With such an organization everything would be much easier. For example, how to find kindergarten place for my boy in time. (...) My youngest child is from a relationship with an Iranian man, whom I met in Austria, but he has already been deported, as Norway had been his entrance place in Europe. He received a negative notice from this Scandinavian state. Before his deportation, I tried to help him out, so that he would be able to stay in Austria. He lived with us for nine months, but it was not easy, as he was always nervous because of his lacking papers. In addition, we had a couple of fights over my pregnancy, as he wanted me to get an abortion. But I wanted (and gave birth to) this child. (...) Nowadays I cannot trust anyone (anymore), as something always went wrong in my life. I only have two friends from Iran, whom I know from my German course. I am always occupied with my children and we only get to spend time with my sister sometimes. She lives in Stuttgart and is waiting for decision on her asylum application. Her application had already been declined once. If I feel bad, we go and visit her. (...) In Austria, I have already finished an eight-month education as a domiciliary nurse. I worked in this field for a short time, I got a job at Volkshilfe, where I worked for a year. In the meantime I got pregnant and now I am on maternity leave, which does not cover the apartment costs, but are being paid by the social security office. I am really thankful for that. (...) I have not seen my family for three years now. The journey to Iran is simply too expensive. I would like to visit my mother, but I also would like to pass the driving license, to be able to take my children somewhere around in town or elsewhere. (...) The relationship with my mother

is good. I mean, she had her problems and issues, but being a mother on my own, I understand her better nowadays.

Protection

At the beginning of my stay in Austria, I wore my headscarf for four months, but as soon as I started my German course, I did not want to have those looks from the others. That is why I decided to take it down. Just like that. Even in Iran, I had problems with my headscarf, I could never put it on correctly. Here, I was happy not to wear it any longer. If a woman knows how to defend herself, she does not need a headscarf any longer. Why should I cover my hair? Religion is still important to me and makes me feel comfortable. But in the Islamic Republic State of Iran women must wear a headscarf, although maybe the majority does not want to wear one. As I am not forced to put on a headscarf, I do not put it on. Still, I am a religious person: I fast, pray and I am thankful for everything I have. Religion helps my soul. That is why I think religion is beautiful.

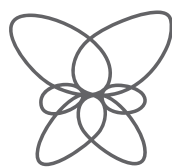
Belongings

I do not miss anything from Iran, except my mother. I have not seen anything there – no lake, no sea. The place where we lived, we just had an imam and a mosque next to us. If I felt bad, I went there. I miss that place and my mother a lot. Otherwise, I do not miss anything. I do not even want to imagine going back to Iran. (...) Here I have a passport and I can travel easily. I do not need anything for moving around. If someone would like to travel the same distance as from here to Salzburg in Iran, they would need permission, which would be valid for ten days. Here, with my passport, I have an identity. (...) I feel like being at home. (...). But some Afghan men are scared of me. They are afraid that I will tell their wives silly stories or lecture them about their rights in life. (...) My future dream is for my children to study at the university and have a good job. Although I do not know if they actually would like to take that path ...

As a group, discuss different characteristics/circumstances and identities of Zakie. Write these characteristics/circumstances in the table below. What are the identities that have caused Zakie to experience discrimination? In what way? Write the answers in the last column of the table.

CHARACTERISTIC/ CIRCUMSTANCE	ZAKIE'S IDENTITY/CHARACTERISTIC/ CIRCUMSTANCE	DISCRIMINATION, DIFFICULT LIFE, PREJUDICES, STEREOTYPES
SEX/GENDER		
NATIONALITY		
RACE or ETHNIC ORIGIN		
NATIVE LANGUAGE		
RELIGION or RELIGIOUS BELIEF		
DISABILITY		
AGE		
SEXUAL ORIENTATION		
GENDER IDENTITY and GENDER EXPRESSION		
SOCIAL STATUS		
ECONOMIC STATUS		
EDUCATION		
<i>(write the characteristic/ circumstance of your choice)</i>		

If you are interested in other women's stories, you can read them in the collection Her Stories, which is available at: https://sloga-platform.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Njene-zgodbe_WEB.pdf



AT THE CROSSROAD
OF INEQUALITIES /
DISCRIMINATION

The worksheet is part of the e-training Intersectional Discrimination in Youth Work, prepared by the Forum for Equitable Development in cooperation with project partners Zavod Global, Nosotras Onlus and Asociația Pro Democratia.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the National Agency can be held responsible for them.