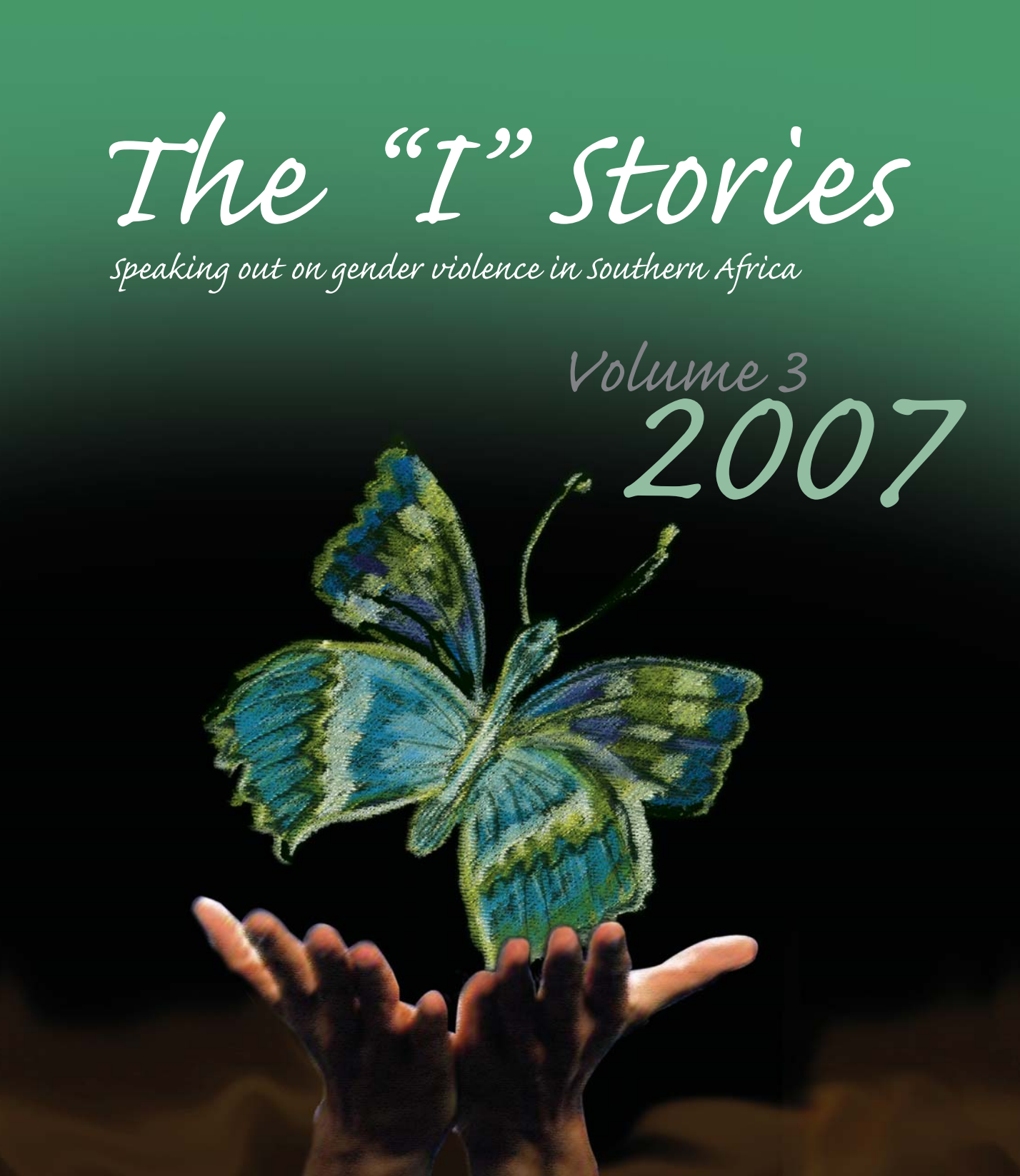
The "I" Stories

Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa

Volume 3

2007



Gender Links is a Southern African NGO that is committed to a region in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of public and private life. www.genderlinks.org.za

The Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network is an umbrella organisation of institutions and organisations that promote gender equality both within and in the editorial content of the media.

Nisaa is a community based non-governmental, non-profit organisation which focuses on the abuse of women and their children (who are secondary victims of abuse) and women's issues. Nisaa is opposed to all forms of oppression, exploitation and violence against women. http://www.nisaa.org.za

People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) aims to create a safe society that does not tolerate violence against women, and where women are powerful, self- reliant, equal and respected. http://www.powa.co.za

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Printers: DS Print Media

Sponsors:
Fokus, through the Norwegian Council on Africa
Hivos.

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In this series, where writers have given their consent, face photos are used with their stories



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Acknowledgements

We salute the courage of all those who, by telling their stories through this series, help to lay bare the injustices that continue to afflict women in our society. Several partners cooperated in producing this third volume of “I” stories: Gender Links, the Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA), Nisaa Institute for Women’s Development; People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA), Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) and GEMSA Zambia. We wish to thank our sponsors, Hivos and Fokus through the Norwegian Council for Africa (NCA) for supporting the production of the stories in print and radio formats, as well as several media houses in the region for disseminating these stories widely as part of the Sixteen Days of Activism on Gender Violence Campaign in 2007.



Foreword

By Maleshoane Motsiri*



To be a woman in this country is very difficult. I sometimes overhear men commenting that the government favours women in this country, but what I do not understand is how the government can claim to be protecting women when they are still experiencing violence because they are women.

The only thing that protects the rights of women is a small book called the Constitution. When you read that book, you will take it for granted that women are safe, but when you visit a court of law or police station, you will be disappointed. Women's rights are not necessarily guaranteed by those appointed to be the custodians of the justice system.

Women who experience violence have two choices. They can choose to accept abuse and remain silent or complain to friends and family about it, while ultimately doing nothing to change their situation. On the other hand, they have the choice to break the silence by saying "no" to violence and seeking help from organisations or other support structures. As I write today, I want to applaud every woman who has summoned the courage to say "enough with violence" and has gone out to change her situation.

From personal experience, I understand how hard it can be to take that bold stand, especially when one has no support from their families, friends, congregation or their immediate community. Last year, I participated in the I Story project as a survivor of gender violence (see I Stories Volume 2, "Reclaiming my life".) Now I am a counsellor and a housemother at a People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA) shelter. I love my job and every day I pray, hoping to see a revolution in this country. I vowed to myself and to God that when I join the struggle to fight women abuse I will stand firm until I see positive change towards women's emancipation. It may be taking a long time but I believe that one day we will succeed. I also believe that if all woman can take it upon themselves to stand together and support each other in this battle our voices will be heard. I also understand that when women are in abusive relationships it may take long to make sense of the actions of the perpetrator. There are many reasons. It may be because of how they were socialised. For example as a girl child one is told that a woman is responsible for keeping the family bond intact. As a result, when there is discord in the family, a woman blames herself for it and more often than not, the extended family exacerbates the pressure. This is the point women begin to feel despondent - lose hope, self respect, confidence and self esteem.

What is most disappointing is that when women eventually find the courage to go and report the matter to the police station, many times this is regarded as a private matter. They are sent back home and expected to solve their own problems because it's a "family matter." When you go back home you face the same cycle of violence. Even when you go back, this time bruised, they ask you about the injuries and send you for a

Protection Order at the magistrate court without opening an assault case. From experience as a counsellor, when I look at the legal system there is a level of insensitivity even in dealing with issues of sexual abuse such as rape. When women go to report at the police station, they are asked to narrate the story repeatedly. Some of the questions asked essentially shift the blame on the women for bringing it upon themselves. For example, you are asked about the clothes you were wearing or the time of the incident. Every time you give an answer they make insensitive comments. They seem not to care about how you feel. This contributes to women often remaining silent and choosing to stay in abusive relationships.

When the police decide to open a docket for your case the courts often do not make it any easier. Women find it more daunting than going to the local police station. I know that some women will actually regret going there, that is the reason some of them choose to withdraw the case. When they choose to go through with it, there are still challenges along the way. There will be postponement and the survivor of violence has to go out there living with the fact that the perpetrator is also out there on bail. As a result, women have to stay in hiding, as they fear for their life. The court hearings are not any easier as the questioning is quite rigorous. By the time the court is ready to issue a verdict, it could be a year or 2 later.

As I was writing this story, one of my clients had just been to court to receive judgement for a case she had filed against her husband. As soon as she left court she called me to tell me that her husband had been acquitted in all three charges; two attempted murders and one assault against her.

I could not understand how despite all the evidence he was still found innocent. I know the trauma she has been through and cannot make sense of the legal fraternity. As I was preparing to meet her I continuously asked myself what I could say to her to make her feel better, to reassure her that she would be okay and encourage her to stay positive when all the odds were against her.

My work as a counsellor has made me understand more how the justice system continues to fail women. I hate how the system treats women; I hate how they degrade women, I hate the way women have to go to great lengths to prove abuse. That is why I salute and choose to show gratitude to every woman who has gathered enough strength to take this difficult journey to fight abuse and report abuse. I also want to encourage every woman suffering in silence to speak out. I want to reassure them that it is not their fault, it will never be. Instead, they deserve respect, love, care and happiness. Nobody can give that to you and you do not need to slave for it because if and only if you can look hard within, you will find it.

I salute all the women who through this third volume of I Stories have taken a stand to say NO to women abuse. Even those who have not experienced violence directly in their lives have a role to listen and support these women in need. It is through your voices that we as women will finally be free.

(Maleshoane Motsiri is a survivor of gender violence who became a counsellor at POWA after participating in the "I Stories" project in 2006. She has become a vocal spokesperson for women's rights as well as a pillar of strength to many women seeking to break out of abusive relationships.)



Gender violence is all around



Locked in a loveless marriage

By Daphne Butele,* South Africa

I am a 29 year old woman from Mmabatho but living in Soweto, Johannesburg. I live in a very abusive marriage but am struggling to leave because I do not believe that I can make it without my husband. I have lived with my husband since 1998, we got married in 1999 after having a beautiful daughter together. My daughter is 8 years old now and I've got no regrets having her because she is my princess, my angel, she is the reason for me to live.

When I met him he was so sweet, so loving, I knew by then that I had found my prince charming. I believed in him, I gave myself to him, trusted him with my life even though people tried to warn me. I did not listen, I was blinded by love. I met him in 1997, moved in with him in 1998 but my mom did not know that. I grew up with my granny while my mom was back at school finishing her studies.

My granny was a domestic worker here in Johannesburg. I lived with her up until I was old enough to go to boarding school. She then decided to move back to Mmabatho and find me a boarding school. I lived there up until I met my husband and moved in with him.

My mom thought I was at school but I was not. Things started turning sour after having a baby and being married. He changed completely; I realised that he was a womaniser and was cheating on me. He did not care if I knew because I had already seen it. Whenever I approached him about it he would say I deserved it. He was starting to abuse me emotionally and physically. He was no longer cheating but actually doing it so that I would know that he was being unfaithful. We are staying in a complex and he has affairs with other women living there.

My daughter was living with us but I had to take her back to Mmabatho in June 2007 because the fighting was really traumatising her. She is now living with my granny. She used to watch her father beating me, swearing at me, telling me how useless I was, telling me to sell my body for a living because I am not employed. One day he beat me up and I was there lying down on the floor bleeding, helpless. My daughter was crying with me. He ordered me to stand up and clean the blood on the floor. I tried but I couldn't. I saw my daughter jumping up, taking a cloth and cleaning for me, she was afraid he was going to beat me again if I did not clean it up. That was the most painful day of my life; what am I doing to my daughter?

I was crying but not because of the pain of the assault but I was crying for my daughter. I felt guilty for letting her see things like that. My daughter would play with other children but when the father comes back she would come straight home. I think she felt she had to protect me because she knew her father, when at home, would always do something. I did not want her to see these things.

I used to go to the police station every weekend because I was being beaten up. I did was not lay charges but would tell the police to talk to him, calm him down but I did not want him arrested. Every time the police left he would start again accusing me of having an affair with them. I was afraid to get him arrested because he threatened to kill me when he was let out of prison.

He still accused me of having affairs. He started recording me having sex. He would sometimes tell me that he dreamt about me having sex with another man. He would beat me as if he was in a fight with another man, kicking me, throwing me outside, and telling me he does not want a bitch for a wife. After all that I was supposed to sleep with him; if I said no he felt I was having an affair with someone else. He would force himself on me telling me how cold and dry I was. I did not want to go back home when he chased me away but I felt it was my right to stay in our house because I had contributed a lot to it.

I am not sure if I can make it on my own.. He said where was I going to find a job, I am an old lady, they are looking for young and talented ladies now. He would promise young girls aged 19-22 years old jobs telling them that he would not find me one because I am old and ugly. Those were his girlfriends. He once told me that he has found himself another wife, he wants me to leave because the new wife wants to come and stay with him.

He showed my daughter to that girl and told her to call her mommy. I refused to leave the house. I told him to go and took for another house for his new wife because I was not going anywhere. He said he wanted us to divorce, and then I said it was okay because law was going to take its course. He did not go on with the divorce, I do not know why. He said if he divorces me then he was going to lose a lot of things, he is waiting for me to divorce him, then I can go, and he wants to watch me suffer for the rest of my life.

I sometimes wonder if I was born to suffer, because I cry almost everyday. I prayed for years asking God to change my life for the better. Instead my problems are getting worse every day. I have given up on having any chance of happiness with my husband. Now I can see that I am only forcing things, they are not going to be okay. Now I am praying, but not for my husband to change because he is not going to.

I am only praying to God to give me power and strength to get myself out of this horrible nightmare. I want to let go but it is not easy especially for an unemployed mother. I have lost my self-esteem; I have lost trust in myself. I feel like a failure in life. I am not sure if I can face life by myself again. Every time I think of letting go I ask myself questions like: Where am I going to go? Will I be able to provide for my baby? Will I be able to give her a place to stay? Will I ever find happiness again?

I really do not trust myself. I feel useless or maybe it is because my husband keeps reminding me that I am nothing without him. He even threatens to take my baby away from me if I try to divorce him. He says the law will give him my baby because I am unemployed and cannot provide for her. He can give her everything.

Right now I am trying to find myself and trying to find an easier way to get myself out of this mess, I hope it is just a matter of time. One day it will be over and I know I will be happy again I just need to be sure. I just want to be a good and loving mother to my beautiful daughter and one day have her be proud of me.

** not her real name*



Date rape can happen to anyone

By Cara Ann, South Africa

I can hear what everyone is saying and I know what is going on around me, but I can't move. I can't open my eyes. I can't scream for help. I woke up in tears. Again.

For the past two years, I had this same nightmare at least once a week. At first, I didn't know why. Not until I took a chance to think and realise the truth. It happened to me. I got date-raped. I didn't want to admit the truth until now.

My matric year had just started. We had dinner parties and cocktail parties every other weekend. Then I was invited to a party in Durbanville, a suburb in the Western Cape. All my friends were going and it was rumoured to be the "event of the year." Despite all the expectation, I did not feel like going. My instinct, I guess. In the end, I went anyway.

I arrived at the party, had a drink and made my way to talk to everyone. I knew most of the people there and had a good time catching up with old friends.

In between the conversations, the snacks, the speeches and my second drink, I bumped into a guy I used to see at various parties. He is good-looking, sporty and nice, and after spending a few occasions together, I considered him a friend.

He was anything but a friend. He tried to kiss me after a short conversation, when I informed him of the fact "that it's just not going to happen." He said that he was sorry and offered to get me a drink. I accepted his "apology."

He came back with the drink, which he tried to hand to me with a kiss. I turned my head. He tried to convince me to give him a kiss when he grabbed my face and pushed me into the wall. We kissed. It was a forced kiss.

I can't remember much after that. I knew something was happening, but he drugged my drink. I could feel my pants being unzipped. I could feel someone touching my breasts. I could hear breathing on my skin, as my bum was lifted up, and my panty slipped off. It was as if I was in a deep sleep. I was having a nightmare.

I knew that something was wrong and I made soft noises but my tongue could not move. It was a nightmare. I wanted to wake up. I wanted strength. I wanted to fight. I couldn't. It's only a nightmare. I was paralysed

- poisoned to silence. I was a marionette for someone else's pleasure, my naked body his blow-up doll.

Through the drugged sleepiness, I had the strength to open my eyes. What I saw was terrifying; beyond any nightmare, it was reality. It was happening to me. His disgusting naked body was on top of mine. His hands were touching me, his breath teasing me.

I was confused. How did this happen. Is this a dream? Is this real? I had the strength to lift my head and I saw. I saw what it was. With effort, I lifted my arm and hit him on his back.

He gave a groan of pleasure. With this haunting sound, a power took over me. I jumped up and screamed. I cried as I hit him over and over again.

We were in a dark corner in the back of a building. I ran away pulling my pants up. I was devastated. I didn't know where I was. As I ran towards a building, I saw people having a good time. I was still at the party. I ran through a crowd of staring eyes, towards the bathroom. I crumbled into devastation.

The cries that came out of me that night were something I've never experienced before. I don't cry in front of people. I'm strong. I'm a respectable woman. But a nightmare reality took away my personality, my self respect. I was a stranger to myself.

I grabbed my clothes, rubbing all over my body. I was disgusted in myself. I felt estranged with my body. A friend knocked on the door; she wanted to know what was going on. Everyone was talking about me. They thought I was drunk. She came into the bathroom and tried to give me a hug. I could not let anyone touch me.

The next day I took a long bath. I looked at my bruised legs and I saw the blood in my underwear. I ignored the obvious fact. I could not admit that he raped me. I am a strong woman. I went to another party the next night. The same people were there but it was a different scene. Everyone stared at me as I entered the room with a tired smile. The guys pointed and made comments about me. That's when they started teasing and singing at me, saying that I was drunk and had sex with their friend.

A girl whispered, "Why did she come? She should have known this would happen." I should have listened to my intuition. I should not have gone to that party. This experience changed me into a hard person. One night sacrificed my ability to ever have a healthy sexual relationship. I don't want to feel. I can't cry. I can love but I can't show it. I am still that lifeless blow-up doll that he turned me into.

I want people to know that gender violence can happen to anyone, no matter what age, popularity, race or income group. Date rape is rape. We have to fight it.

Where is the law when you need it ?



Walking away with nothing

By Mmabatho Moyo,* South Africa

When I was 17 years old, I was going back home after a basketball match at a nearby school with four friends when a stranger offered to give us a lift home. We reluctantly accepted. He dropped my friends first. I felt uneasy about being alone with him, but he reassured me that he would take me home.

I gave him directions to our home just a few metres from where my last friend had been dropped off but to my dismay he went in the opposite direction. He took out a gun and threatened to kill me if I screamed. I tried to protest but he angrily told me to keep quiet. Instead, he took me to a secluded place and parked the car under a big tree.

Despite my attempts to run away he dragged me out of the car placing his hand on my mouth and forced me to the ground. He tore off my pants and raped me. He told me not to tell anyone including my parents or he would kill me and everyone I told.

He gave me R20 and directed me to a taxi home. I felt sick by the time I got home, but just told my parents that I had been delayed at the match and had a stomachache. I could see she did not believe me and I felt ashamed of myself.

The next day my trail of lies continued. I told my sister that I had fallen on a sharp object, and she gave me painkillers. I eventually healed physically, but mentally I was devastated. I went back to school after three days. Life continued as if everything was normal.

I was a Matric student. Three months lapsed, and exam time came. I had started to bulge, and I knew I was pregnant. My mother noticed and took me to the clinic, where a doctor confirmed her fears. My mother, father, aunt and an uncle summoned me to a meeting to enquire who the father was. When I told them I did not know, they became agitated. How was I supposed to know when a stranger raped me?

They did not continue interrogating me. I suppose they suspected that I was raped. My family was supportive. I gave birth to a three-month premature baby girl. My sister offered to take my daughter in and raise her on my behalf to give me a chance to pick myself up.

One Sunday, when my daughter was three, a man driving a Mercedes Benz arrived at our house and asked to see me. I went up to him but could not identify him. He then asked me where his child was and I instantly remembered who he was because he had a resemblance with my daughter.

I called my brother who took him to my sister's house. My sister initially resisted letting him see my daughter. After much persuasion from my brother, she gave in. At that time, I worked as an Accounts Clerk and my future was looking bright.

Six months later, he sent his elders to negotiate for lobola. My parents did not want me to marry him but my uncles persuaded them to give him a chance, since I was willing to do the same by then. We got married in 1987 and lived happily until 1990, when everything changed. The first thing he did was force me to resign from work, based on the cultural expectation that women do not work. I received my provident funds upon resignation. My husband used it to buy two taxis so he could start a business.

I could no longer have children and so my husband threatened to marry two other wives, but I took it as a joke. Then the cycle of abuse started. He bought lots of groceries and then went away from home for almost three months, leaving me locked in the house. He went with all keys to the house and gate. Literally, I was under house arrest!

He came back, bought more groceries, and stayed for four days before disappearing again. It became my way of life. In some instances, he would leave me with R4000 to buy anything I wanted despite that he would have left me locked in the house. Upon his return, he would tell me how stupid I was for not using the money. His taxi business was booming by then. My life was hell, held prisoner in my own house.

In 2001, he came home just after midnight and woke me up demanding a cup of tea. I declined and he became aggressive. He threatened to shoot me to death. I woke up, went to the kitchen in tears and plugged in the kettle to make tea. Reaching for the cup in the cupboard, for some reason I decided to turn and as I did so, he released the trigger and shot me. Fortunately, the bullet did not go straight into my head but became lodged close to my scalp.

I fell unconscious and woke up in hospital four months later. The Metro Police had picked me up in Zuurbekom. I was hospitalised for 13 months, as I had lost my speech and could not walk from severe shock and blood loss. I had to go through speech therapy, counselling and physiotherapy. I then went to a mental institution where I was hospitalised for seven months.

My husband came, threatened me and pointed firearms at patients and staff with who I shared the ward. Instead of protecting me, the hospital discharged me to go back to him.

The abuse started again and became worse. For instance, one day he came and told me to climb on the coffee table. He then put his finger in my vagina to check if I had been with any other men. It was very degrading and embarrassing. After that day I made up my mind, I was going to divorce him.

That week when he went to fuel his taxis, I got the chance to run away. Fortunately, my daughter with whom we were now living gave me R36 to use for transport. When he found out that I was missing he went around my relatives' houses threatening to kill them if they did not disclose my whereabouts. Nobody gave in.

I went ahead with filing for a divorce and succeeded. However, what was painful was that I did not get anything out of the many properties and thirteen taxis we owned. When police accompanied me to fetch my clothes, I could not even get them. He walked away with everything I had worked for.

However, I now live with my daughter and work as a volunteer at People opposed to Women Abuse (POWA) giving court preparation support to women. My work has been therapeutic as I feel like I am making a difference to other women who have been through similar experiences. The justice system needs to work for women and it is not doing that right now.

* not her real name



Finding myself, with no help from the police

By Kedibone Sithole,* South Africa

I was born in a rural village called Ganyesa in South Africa's North West province 37 years ago. My family did not have much money when we were growing up. When I was about 20 years old, I set out to get a job and found myself in Lenasia. I had one child by then who was one year old. I needed money to raise her since I did not live with the father. Because I had not completed my studies, it was difficult to get an office job, so I began working as a domestic worker.

Not long after, I met the man of my dreams who promised me the world. He paid lobola after I got pregnant with our second child. After that, everything began to turn bitter. To start with he stopped me from working so I could not earn an income and solely relied on him. This began the violent lifestyle that would characterise my life. I should have left then, but at that time I did not realise that this was economic violence. In any case, I hoped things would become better.

He started abusing me in every possible way – economically, emotionally, physically and so on. I was even isolated from my family, friends and the rest of the community. He did not allow me to go to church because he believed I would have affairs with men from the congregation and the priest. Whenever I wanted to go out of the house, I had to inform him. The few times my family members or friends came to visit, he would accuse them of finishing his children's food, or worse, saying they had come to bewitch his home.

As if that was not enough, my husband did not support my children. Instead, he preferred to provide for his parents and siblings, including their children, yet they have their own homes. I could not raise concerns with him about this because that caused fights. On the contrary, my children and I never got the same attention from him. For instance, we only got a plate of food a day and little money to buy clothes once a year in December.

I tried to talk to him many times about how his behaviour made me feel inadequate and unhappy but that always caused a fight between us. He would even point his gun at me. Many violent times followed. Each time I reported these to the local police station, I got no joy. They would tell me that I had no physical evidence such as a "blue-eye." They told me it was a private matter and we should resolve it ourselves. Most of them were my husband's friends. In fact they even asked me to think about who would take care of my children if I got my husband arrested. It made me feel guilty and I often ended up withdrawing the charges.

The violence continued for a long time until in 2005, for the first time I tried to apply for a Protection Order against him. I had had enough. On that day, he had threatened to kill the kids, himself and me. Thank

God, it did not work out. I spent many months running from pillar to post between the magistrate court, the police station and my house whenever he was violent, but got no help.

One weekend I got him arrested and he spent the rest of it in jail. Predictably, the case never went to court because at the time of the arrest he had more than six thousand rands in his pocket. Instead, the detective who opened the docket threatened to put me in jail. The night he came from jail, he wanted to kill us, and I reported the matter to the police. They confiscated his gun and went to drop me at my sister's place, but left without a written statement.

I decided to go and seek help before it was too late. I went to NISAA Institute for Women Development where they organised a shelter for my children and me. He traced me, begged for my forgiveness, and promised to change. He even booked for counselling. He promised to buy a wedding ring. Since the police had confiscated his gun, he begged me to go and sign out his gun.

Barely two weeks after taking me back, it was business as usual. He accused me of cheating on him, that I was a witch and a black cat. The next morning he started scolding me for refusing to close the door for him while he was standing near the door and became violent, shattering glass all over the floor. I managed to escape through the window because he had locked the door.

I found the POWA phone number and called them. They organised shelter for me at NISAA. Officers from NISAA spoke to the police officer in charge at Lenasia who once again made us go round in circles in between different police stations. Unfortunately, I fell into the hands of an officer who is my husband's friend. He took me to my house in order to collect my children and clothes. I could not collect my children or clothes as my husband refused. In the end, they went and dropped me by the roadside and I had to go and put up at my sister's house.

I just want to warn young sisters and brothers that education is the only key to success and self-empowerment and that marriage is good but also tough. Women need to unite to break the cycle of violence and this begins with breaking the silence.

* not her real name

When a policeman turns abuser

By Thandi Mkhize,* South Africa

As I write this story, I am living in a shelter. In September 2006, I met my partner who is a police officer. By October, I thought I was in love with him, but there were problems and we separated. I found out I was pregnant and told him. He begged me to come back to him. I decided to go back to him in January 2007 even though I realised I didn't love him anymore. In the beginning, it was good.

When I was four months pregnant, he started to hit me. I was always unhappy and he said that I was being silly and that he would not pay lobola. He slapped me on my face he and poured water all over me. I left him in the house and ran away.

After a few minutes, he phoned me and apologised and I accepted his apology. Things were good again. I gave birth to my beautiful child in July 2007. Just a month later, he became physically abusive again. He was always unhappy and I kept apologising even though I had not done anything wrong. He would go out without saying where he was going. I would wonder where he had gone. When we slept in the same bed, he wouldn't even want to touch me. He slept with his clothes on and his phone was always ringing at night.

On the 21 September 2007, he came back from work at 19h00. He usually comes back at 16h00. He took a bath, took his father's car and went out. He came back at one o' clock in the morning. I confronted him and asked him where he had been. He just kept quiet and ignored me; he took his earphones and put them in his ears. I took those earphones and threw them away because I was very cross. He ignored me. I decided that it was best for me to sleep because he was treating me like a fool. I was sleeping when he slapped me then punched me. My baby was next to me at the time.

He went to his safe took out his gun and went outside; he then shot in the air. He came back inside, pointed the firearm at my nose, and told me to smell the smoke that came out of the gun. He told me that he was going to shoot the baby and me and then pointed the gun at the baby.

The next day he apologised. I did not accept it but pretended that I had accepted his apology. I did not love him anymore. I told his mother what had happened. She told me I was being cruel and that I was telling lies about her son. She also said that I am Xhosa, I should go back to my parents house because I don't have respect for her son who is Zulu. She said her son chased me away because he didn't like me because I was thin, I was skin and bones. She also said that she can see that I didn't love her son, I only loved his money.

I remember one day I was talking to my brother who is in jail. My heart was very sore and I cried. My partner

came in and asked why I was crying, I told him the whole story. He said that he cannot be with someone who is having family problems. He said it is better that I go back to my family. He then went out and told his mother and his mother agreed with him.

On the 24 September 2007, we returned from the shops and he wanted to have sex. I asked him if he was sleeping around because I needed to know his HIV status. He hit me again. That night he told me to go back to my parent's house because I had another man. I did not answer him because I knew that he was going to hit me if I answered him. He then said I am making a fool of him by not answering him. He started hitting me on the bed and the baby was there too.

I saw that the baby was going to get hurt so I decided to sleep on the floor. He kept on talking and I told him that it was best that he goes and sleeps with his younger brother. He really went out when I got up to close the door. He punched me on my mouth, I fell down, and he kept hitting me. He then handcuffed me, my nose and lips were bleeding.

His mother came and asked what was going on. I could not answer her. She blamed me. His sisters told him to take the handcuffs off. When they were not concentrating on me, I tried to escape and ran to the police station. He ran after me and found me on my way to the police station. He kicked me to my feet and I fell down. His younger brother was present and he did not help me.

He sent his younger brother back to the house to fetch the handcuffs. He then handcuffed me again and continued hitting me. Security guards who patrol at night asked what was going on he told them that I was mad. He said that they must hold me because I would be hit by oncoming traffic.

His father came with the car, put me in the car and drove back to the house. He unlocked the handcuffs after we arrived in the house. I escaped again and got a lift from someone who said he is an off duty traffic officer. He stopped a police van from Meadowlands Police Station to take me to their police station where my boyfriend works. He told me I could not open a case against him because when he comes out of jail he would come back to kill me. The police phoned an ambulance that took me to Baragwanath Hospital where they treated me and referred me to a social worker. The social worker referred me to NISAA.

I had to leave without my daughter. NISAA helped me go to court and get my baby back. When I left, I was breastfeeding. When I got my baby back I could no longer breastfeed her.

The sad part is that I am unemployed. I have a three-month-old baby and he made me leave my job. I am looking for a job because I owe the bank money. I borrowed money to bury my brother who died October 2006. The good part is that I am out of that relationship and I have my daughter with me.

** not her real name*

Even the little I had got taken away

By Mbundi Violet Kahale with Perpertual Sichikwenkwe, Zambia

For many years, I raised cattle and sold maize to earn money to take care of myself and children left in my care by my siblings who had died, including a 10-year old blind child. I could not have known that this would end with me falsely imprisoned for a year and a half, and all that I worked so hard for taken away.

On July 4, 2005, I went to Lukulu Police Station to follow up the maize and monies owed to me from my former husband. While at the police, two female police officers asked me if I had seen any people selling or buying cattle in my village. I said no. The police told me that they had information that I had stolen 21 heads of cattle. I told them that I was going to bring the person who sold me the cattle to the police station, but I was unable to find him. I told the officers this when I returned to the station a few days later.

It was then that male officers handcuffed me to metal on the ground and started questioning me. I had my one year, eight months-old granddaughter on my back as the officers battered me. In the night, a CID officer told me to remove my pants and bend while I was still handcuffed to the metal on the ground. He stood behind me and started pulling my labia.

The officers continued battering me. When my grand child cried, one of the officers slapped her hard on her face and told her, "You have been eating stolen cattle with your grandmother." On the following day, the magistrate came to see me in the police cells. He instructed the police officer to take me to the magistrate court for mention and a speedy trial so that I could go and rot in Mongu prison, the biggest prison in Western province. The officer took me to court. The Magistrate read out a charge of two counts of stock theft and sentenced me to five years for each. I raised my hand to ask who the complainant was in the matter, but the Magistrate told me to shut up, as I was a thief.

That is how my trial went. I had no chance to know whose cattle I had stolen, when and where. They did not give me a chance to speak, or have a fair trial where witnesses could testify to my theft. The following morning around 04:00 hours I was told to leave my granddaughter at the reception and I was taken to Mongu Prison.

Before I could raise the money for the appeal, I was then taken to Mukobeko Maximum Prison in Kabwe Central Province. While at Mukobeko a female warder told Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) which took the matter to court and represented me until I was released.

When I got to Lukulu, I found that the police officers got my cattle, four bags of maize and that my house burned down with everything I owned. Some relatives had taken the orphans, my children and grandchildren. However, I learned that the grandchild I had left at the police station the day police arrested me died of malaria while I was in prison.

I could not stay in Lukulu. It was too much for me to bear. Now I have no field and no seed to help me grow my own food. I have nothing. I even wish those people had just killed me at the time of arrest or that I had died than to live like this.

Before this ordeal, I grew my own food; I worked hard for myself, and had enough to eat and feed the orphans in my custody. Now my house and all my household goods are gone. I do not even know how my grandchild died. Her death traumatises me. I know that these people committed an offence to send me to prison without trial, but if I pursue the case, they would kill me. I would rather leave them alone.

Gender violence, HIV and AIDS



Raped, made pregnant and HIV positive

By Luyando Chobya* with Perpertual Sichikwenkwe, Zambia

I am a 14-year-old girl who was detained at Prospect Police Post on the Lusaka-Kabwe Road near Kabwe town for three months before being taken to Mukobeko prison on July 31 2007. While I was there, a police officer raped me. I now have a child, and am living with HIV.

A friend I knew at school stole some clothes and came to my parents' house to seek shelter as she was looking for somewhere to go. She did not tell me that the clothes were stolen and even gave me some to wear. One day, my mother went to the roadside market where she heard people saying that my friend was being looked for by the police officers because she stole some clothes. I confronted my friend who immediately took off to an unknown destination. My father thought it wise to report the matter to the nearby police station. The officers and the woman whose clothes were stolen came to our house, where they found me in one of the tops that my friend gave me. They arrested me and took me to Prospect Police post where I was detained before I was brought to prison. Despite my parents and me explaining what happened, I was charged with burglary and theft and I was also told that I would be kept in custody until they could find the friend I was alleging had given me the clothes. My father tried to sign a bond for me but the police refused. While in custody, a police officer whom I can identify used to take me to his home at night and repeatedly rape me and threaten to kill me if I told anyone about what he was doing to me. The officer would be alone on night duty when the officer-in-charge (OIC) and another night officer travelled out of town.

One day, while the officer was taking me back to my cell from his house, one male detainee saw us and told the officer that he would report him to higher authorities. The police officer pleaded with him not to report the matter but he reported still. The OIC opened a docket against this officer. I was then moved to Mukobeko prison where I developed a strong rash on my face. When I went to the prison clinic, they discovered that I was pregnant and infected with a sexually transmitted infection (STI). The Prospectus Police post then sent a letter to the prison authorities requesting to allow me go to the hospital for a medical check up with the same officer who impregnated me. The hospital tested the officer for HIV and he was positive. I was positive too. The medical results also confirmed that I was raped. The officer then confessed to my mother that he infected me and that he had sexually abused me. We also learnt that the officer was a widower. The officer was transferred to another station within the province while I have remained here with my problems.

I now have many problems, which may lead me to death for helping a friend whom I thought needed my protection. The officer took advantage of my situation and left me with a life-long disease, and a child who may be positive too.

* not her real name



Gender violence and marginalised communities



A long and difficult path from home

By Rachel Lilongile,* South Africa

I did not wish to leave my country. I did not wish to leave everyone I knew - but life had become too dangerous to keep living where we were.

My dad left Kinshasa, our home in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in 2001. He was a pilot who worked with the now-deceased President of Congo, Sese Seko Mobutu. At this time, everyone who worked for Mobutu was to go and work in another province, and my dad went to work in Goma. When he arrived in Goma, a terrible war confronted him. After a few months, we heard from the airline company he was working for that his plane had crashed and that there were no survivors.

Life became very hard without our father. My mother was a nurse, but there was no employment in Kinshasa during this time, and my older brothers had already left the country in search of work. So, we left Kinshasa in early 2002 to live with my aunty in Lubumbashi.

It was when we were living in Lubumbashi that we found out Dad was actually still alive. His plane did crash, but he and three other pilots survived. He left the country amidst the terrible violence going on around him. We had heard the news from a friend of my father's in Lumbumbashi. That person also informed us that Dad had run from Goma to South Africa, where it was safer. This was in 2002.

We informed my older brother, who was living in Angola, that Dad was still alive. In our particular situation, we could not go back to Kinshasa, as there was nothing left of the city. So, my Mum decided to follow Dad to South Africa.

However, we ended up making a long stop in Zimbabwe, before going on to South Africa. We got our passports, left the DRC, and moved to Harare, Zimbabwe, where we stayed for almost three years before leaving for South Africa in January 2005.

As we reached Johannesburg's Park Station, someone stole my handbag that had everything in it, including my money and passport. Fortunately, someone came to help us, and we were able to get support from the Jesuit Refugee Service.

They provided us with shelter for six months, while we discovered that our father was in Cape Town. He sent money for us to rent a room until he got back. In that time, my sisters and I were in school and life was good. I was able to cope with everything that was going on in my life. At that time, I did not feel discriminated

against by others.

Our family was finally reunited when my father was able to move to Johannesburg that July. When Dad moved with us to Jo'burg, everything was all right, but things were different. In my country we had everything—cars, a house—but here we have nothing—no cars, no house. We have to rent a house, which is expensive.

I like South Africa because we have shelter, and it is free and peaceful. But I do not always like South Africa. Sometimes I hate it.

It was a Monday afternoon and I was coming from a Sports Club in Yeoville. I reached the mountain from Yeoville to Bertrams. I was walking, just as I do everyday. On my walk, I met three big boys.

One was coming to face me and the other two stood at the back of me. One started chasing me and I fell and hit my head on the road. The person who was chasing me started to rape me, and I was screaming. A car passing by heard my voice, but it was too late.

I went to the clinic in Hillbrow, and they transferred me to the hospital in Johannesburg. They called my mum and dad and told them what happened. Then we went to the police station to open a rape case. I went for every test. Thank God, I was not HIV positive.

A month later, I was still going for treatment. That is when I found out I was pregnant. Most of the people I talked to told me to put the baby up for adoption, but I decided to keep the baby with me. On 4 December, I delivered a baby boy and until now; I still keep the baby with me. I sometimes have problems caring for him financially, but I would never give him away.

Today I live with my two sisters, two brothers, Mum, Dad, and my baby. I struggle to maintain my schooling, because I cannot always afford to pay my school fees. Sometimes I will attend for one month and then I will be unable to go for another month.

Although my father was a pilot when we lived in the DRC, today he does not have steady employment; he sometimes fixes cars, but he does not have a garage. My mother also does not work regularly, but she sometimes works part time at the local Jesuit Refugee Service.

I felt that both the police and the social workers I spoke to treated me differently because I was a foreigner. When I told the social worker about the rape, she had no sympathy for me; she asked me why I did not stay in my own country. They did not care about me, because I was just a foreigner in their country.

*not her real name

Migrants vulnerable to economic abuse

By Tuca Jonas Massingue

I'm a 27-year-old single mother with three children. I am an outgoing, independent and hard-working person. My life has never been that easy, mostly because I am a Mozambican living in South Africa and have suffered from discrimination and exploitation from people who do not respect human rights. Many migrants do not know their rights, or that they even have any. Before my current job working as a cook, I worked as a live-in domestic worker. This work was in many ways forced. I could not easily go out, or get to know other people, because my employers discouraged it. They always spoke of the police, and said that if I went out, police would deport me back to Maputo.

For a long time, I thought this was the only life possible in South Africa. It was only after some time that I discovered the hidden reality, that what my employers were doing was economic and emotional abuse. For three months, I worked for my employer, without receiving any payment. By that time, I had already left my eldest daughter in Maputo. I had no way of getting money or food to send back home to my family in Maputo. I worked a lot, with almost no time to spend with my other children, so I suffered a lot. I felt helpless. I felt like I could not do anything to stop it. I did not know who to turn to for help. And because I do not speak very much English, my struggles were even more difficult. I know that they were able to do this because of my nationality. Sometimes my employers would send me to the shops near the house. I started to have conversations with people. I told people about my life, and I heard about other people who had better work, and whose employers paid and respected them. However, I was still afraid of police.

In my search for a better life, I discovered that migrants are still entitled to rights. This was something that my boss did not tell me. After a long time, I finally found another opportunity, so I packed my bags and quit working for that employer. Once I started working this better job, I started to see differences in my life. Today I have a nice boss, who treats me fairly, and I am able to make money to survive. I have also found a supportive community and I do not feel discriminated against very often. I also know that I am lucky. I know of so many others, especially women, who are unable to change their situations, even though they are being exploited. I also know of many, whose expectations in the household extend to the bedroom, against their will. However, I still live far away from my children. Their paternal grandparents are now raising them back in Mozambique. I am only able to see them on holidays. I miss them a lot. For a mother, it is difficult to be away from her children.

I wish that people would realise that life for those of us who leave our countries is not that easy. We leave people we care about behind. And even when we are looking for a better life, there are many people who take advantage of us.



Violence - no home for a child



Finding strength is not easy



By Puni Matsimbi, South Africa

In memory of my son Mawabo (1988-09-07 to 2006-03-12)

I liked him a lot. He had seemed like a nice man. Unlike other boys who refused to, he danced with the fuller-figured girls. I was happy when he asked me to dance with him. We were both members of the youth club and danced ballroom and Latin American dance together.

Our story of meeting would have made a great tale for our children or even our grandchildren some day, if things had not gone the way they did. Our meeting and dancing partnership developed into a friendship, then a romantic relationship, and when he proposed marriage, I accepted.

That is when everything changed. From the sweet, non-discriminatory and charming young man whom I believed truly loved me, he became an aggressive, arrogant and some-what diabolical monster. He changed from the young man who had wanted nothing but happiness for me, to this man whose purpose became to bring misery and unhappiness to my life.

Little things made him angry. Like his belief that I hated his family, because I did not visit his family as frequently as my own. Since we were not working, my mother was taking care of our son. I frequently visited them, and sent food and money. My monthly visits were a problem for my husband. He did not see how they related to our son's stay at my mothers.

It happened on a Friday. He accused me of hatred for his family, but this time he locked the door. I was preparing for bed and was wearing my nighty. As he made these accusations, he hit me with everything that was within his reach and sight – the poker from the stove, fists, kicks and even a shambok.

He kicked me in every direction. Amid the kicks and fists, I screamed and pleaded for help. I was hoping that someone would hear my cries and come to my aid. The neighbours heard my screaming and tried pounding against the locked door.

My crying and the beating against the door did not stop him. I cried until I could not cry anymore, but the beating continued. I could hear people talking and exclaiming, "Oh, maybe she's dead!"

I felt like my life was going to end. There was blood everywhere. Every part of my body was aching from the pain and injuries. After trying and failing several times, I managed to open the door. I tried running, but

had no strength. I could not walk. I fell with half of my body still inside the house while the other half was outside.

My neighbours picked me up and took me to their house. They cleaned up my fractured and painful body. They wanted to phone an ambulance, but his friends deterred them, as they feared he would be arrested. It was a week before I made it to a clinic, before returning home to my husband. I spent an entire month in bed covered in bruises. He begged for my forgiveness and promised that it would never happen again.

But the beatings never stopped. He once beat me for asking him why he punched and kicked me like a punching bag. Even with the children in the house, the beatings continued. He would beat me so much and once beat my eyes shut.

Once, upon hearing the noise, my eldest son came from the bedroom, banged through the door and got between my husband and I. "Baba, please forgive her. Please do not do this to her!" he pleaded with his father.

As time went by, I hoped for things to get better. I waited with faith hoping that he would change and things would be different. Things never changed. The beatings continued and with the beatings, my time in bed recovering from injuries increased.

Once after spending time in bed recovering, I decided to go to the doctor for a check-up. The doctor asked me questions about my injuries and sent me to Baragwanath hospital to the abuse centre. When I arrived there, they sent me to the social workers who took down the details of my abuse and sent me back for examinations and reports at the abuse centre.

The following day at about nine in the evening, we were sleeping when there was a knock on the door. My husband went to the door and asked who was at the door. The voice on the other side of the door replied, "Open the door, we are the police!"

He opened the door following which they asked him if he was Goodwin Matsimbi. He responded by saying yes and the police told him that he was being arrested for assaulting Puni Lydia Matsimbi. I realised my visit to the abuse centre resulted in the arrest. I was so happy. The courts gave him free bail and a 5-year suspended sentence.

Within a month of the sentencing, he beat me again and broke my eardrum. Just as he had before, my eldest son pleaded with his father to forgive me. I realised that if I continued to stay with this man, one day he would kill me. I had to leave before that happened. I reported the beating to the police who opened a case of assault against him. Before the police could arrest him, he ran from them.

The relief of his absence was short lived. He unexpectedly came back and started beating me again. Thinking that he would maybe stop if there were other people, I ran outside. He followed me and carried on kicking and beating me.

People came to watch with none offering any help. I was embarrassed and humiliated by the beatings in front of the people. My son tried pleading with him to stop, but his father threw him away. After beating me, he again ran away because he feared arrest. He was given another suspended sentence, but he never went to jail.

After that incident, I ran away with my children and hired a room far away. For the first time in a long time, I felt relief, freedom and peace. Even though I was unemployed at first, I was happy and glad that I had found the missing joy that he took from me.

I got a job and bought myself a house. I was able to make enough money to extend my house. The separation brought lots of happiness and a new beginning. My 3 boys, my daughter and I were happy. Leaving that relationship was the best thing l could do for my children

I lost the job and spent many days at home before finding another. I heard about NISAA (a non-governmental organisation that helps abused women and children) and took some counselling courses with them. After completing the course, they offered me a job as a volunteer.

It was an exciting new adventure. It was my dream to get involved in issues affecting women in similar abusive relationships as mine. I was also excited because it would offer me a chance to heal and help teenagers who were vulnerable to later abuses. I want all men to know that abuse is a crime.

Thinking the pain had ended, I was happy. Then, tragedy struck. On March 2006, a car hit my youngest son Mawabo. He was taken to hospital, but sadly, the day after the accident, 12 March 2006, he passed away.

Having survived the beatings and having managed to move on and start a new beginning, tragedy had struck again. His passing has been very painful and accepting his passing continues to be a daily struggle. My life feels empty, my heart ripped out of my chest and my faith taken from me. It is hard moving on.

Women must not stay in relationships where there is abuse. To accept abuse is to waste your time. If he beats you first it will never stop, you'll get flowers after every beating until the day he buys flowers for your funeral.

Cruelty too much to bear

By Lee Khesi,* South Africa

My name is Lee. I am 18 years old and grew up being discriminated against because I was dark skinned and had pock marks. I was always seen as sick. They even said I had AIDS because of my skin problem. I was labelled the black sheep of the family. They said things that made me think, feel and believe that I was ugly, useless, a mistake, inferior, stupid and born to suffer. I was always filled with hatred, anger and gloom and the only way to express these emotions was through crying.

We lived in Soweto at a family house from the day I was born till I was 18 years old. After my grandmother and uncle passed away, my other uncle decided to move in with his family of six. It was difficult for nine people to live in a four roomed house, people with different attitudes and morals. We were totally different so we decided to move out, my mom, my sister and I. My sister was the bread winner. We moved to Springs and rented a house there from 1 September 2006; by that time my sister was 8 months pregnant and the only one working. The next month on 6 October 2006 ,she had a baby girl and we were very happy because we were starting a new life. That all changed in January 2007.

I always had questions about my father because ever since I was born I never knew him, so I asked my mother about him and she answered in passing, telling me his name. One day my sister came back from work with news that this very man had passed away. I broke down and cried not because I had lost a father but because I had just lost a chance to ask questions that I still have even today. Do you know me? Am I your daughter? Why did you have to leave and what were you thinking all these years? My questions will never be answered.

My sister and I went to the funeral and saw him for the first time and last time. I cried because I was full of anger, hatred and hopelessness. I came back from the funeral in Kwazulu Natal and told myself it is over, my questions are no longer important because my answers are buried with him.

When I came back to Johannesburg, I was relieved because I used to go around wondering whenever I saw a man if he is my dad, what kind of a person is he? Now that I knew he was no more, I was at peace. After some months it came out that he left me money for my education until I was 21 years old. I got the money and studied at a computer college. By this time my mom had become a different person. She used to be an indoor person but now she was going all over the place and we later found out that she was having an affair that made her aggressive. When you talked to her she would freak out. We found out about it when I came home late at around 22h00 and she was not in the house so I woke my sister and the tenant. We started searching for her but there was no trace of her. We went to sleep and at about 4h00 we heard her sneaking in.

The next morning my sister asked her where she had been and that is when the world war broke out she told us we want to rule her life. Screaming and telling us to butt off, she chased my sister out of the house. She said that the man we buried is not my father but only my sister's, she got me out of her bitching and she does not know where I belong. That tore me to pieces, I just could not stand her and I started to hate her. During the process of these fights my sister's daughter got ill and passed away on the 12 March 2007, she was 5 months old.

I stopped talking to her. Everyday when I came home from school I would find my bedroom had been searched and the furniture shifted. She started telling people that I was pregnant because I was gaining weight. She even told my boyfriend's friend and that is how I found out about it. She continued to say that I was a mistake and that she got me out of her bitching around, I was born out of wedlock and that I ruined her marriage.

Then one day when I came home from school I met my mother's friend and she said I should not go home, but I insisted that I wanted to go home. When I got there I found my room changed again. I slipped into my casual clothes to fix my room; while shifting furniture I realised she was at the door. When I turned she stabbed me in the arm with an intention to stab me in the chest. I stormed out of the house screaming to the neighbour's house. The neighbour took me to the clinic and I needed stitching. They came back and asked her why she did it and the answer was: "She ruined my marriage. I'm her mother I have the right to kill her as I had a right to give birth to her". I ran away to stay with my uncle at Orange Farm. Things were not getting any better in Springs - she was chasing my sister with a knife. My uncle saw that it was not getting better he suggested we open a case for her. I did and she was arrested on a Friday and came out on a Monday.

Eventually we were evicted from the house because my mother was misusing the rent money that my sister was giving her. We were left homeless, she vanished into thin air and my sister went to stay with her boyfriend. I had no place to go but the subtenant was kind enough to let me stay with her in her garage.

In all of this, these are the things I lost:

- Parents
- Family
- Boyfriend
- Happy life
- Self-esteem
- True meaning of love
- Dignity as a young woman
- Niece
- Home
- Phone
- My pride
- True meaning of life
- The reason/will to live
- Most of all, hope for a better life

I always knew the world was cruel but did not expect such cruelty from my own parents and family.

*not her real name

Mother's lost love



By Busisiwe Hapiness Sibeko, South Africa

Exodus 20:12 says, "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the lord your God is giving you." For parents who care for and nurture their children this may be true, but in some cases it is parents, and even mothers, that can cause so much heartache.

In 2004, I got a job with a private company and became the breadwinner for my family. Our lives improved impressively. I met my partner in 2005 and we have had a stable relationship. My lifetime dream was to buy a house for my mother and younger sister as a gift. In 2006, I conceived, and at the end of August in the same year, I got the house and we moved to Palm Springs.

At that time, we were very happy. I gave birth to a beautiful 3,5 kg girl in October 2006. That's when things turned to a nasty roller coaster ride. I did all I could, even postponed my wedding, just to please my mother. At Palm Springs, we become close with some of our neighbours. One even got a job for my mother, which she worked at for merely one month. I returned to work, trusting my mother with the baby.

My mother started playing mind games with me. My sister and cousin told me that my mother was having an affair with a reverend. During the day when I was at work, she entertained this man in the house, at my expense. The groceries finished before month end.

My constant questioning made me the enemy. Mom started borrowing money or buying on credit using my name. By month end, people would come to collect money. Every day my mom would insult me about the baby, her daddy, and for not giving her money anymore. She told lies to try to separate my partner and me. Several nights she kicked me out of the house. She always reminded me of my pregnancy before marriage, and the disgrace this brought to the family. When I was at work, I would receive SMS's from my sister and cousin. When I called back, my mom was insulting my sister, and my baby was crying most of the time. Some people in the neighbourhood realised the truth, and tried to intervene.

At the end of February, she kicked me out of the house for good at night. She said I thought she was the landlady we were paying. Truly speaking she had not paid the mortgage payment with the money I was giving her for several months in a row.

My partner took me in. By then she refused to let anyone see my baby, even us the parents. She would forcibly hold the baby when I tried to take her. I was confused and tired. I didn't know what to do. After a while, my baby got sick. My mom knew I did not want my baby to grow up the cultural way. However, after she

kicked me out, she took my baby to a traditional healer. My cousin told me that she was burning muthi at night with my baby.

My baby's illness got worse and my mother finally took her to the clinic. My cousin later told me that my mother put snuff on my baby's nostrils. She saw brown mucus on my baby. That day my mother SMS'd me at work. I called back and she told me that it was time I spent time with my baby and stopped putting my career first.

That night, when my boyfriend and I went to fetch my baby, my mother did not want me to take the baby. She showed me medication from the clinic and told us the nurse said the baby was only teething. She fooled us, saying we should leave the baby with her, and I must rest and go to work. On Friday, she left my baby with my sister and cousin. That weekend, my baby got very bad. She was vomiting, had diarrhoea and was losing weight. She was admitted at Sebokeng hospital. The doctor who examined my baby asked about who was looking after her, the lifestyle we lived, and where the father was. He even threatened to have me arrested if I did not tell him what happened to the baby. I told him all that I knew. He told me someone had given my baby something strong for her intestines, and it had affected her stomach lining. We left the baby in the hospital, seeing her alive for the last time. She was only 5 months old.

My mother returned on that Sunday from Soweto, in a very happy mood. When we told her what happened and what the doctor said, she threatened to sue that doctor saying that she never took the baby to the traditional doctor.

Just a couple of weeks later, my mother stabbed my sister. That evening after work, I went to see a family that is always intervening in our cases. We went to my mom's place to get my sister's clothes, because she had run to Orange Farm to my uncle's home. My mother insulted me about my life, and my cousin about her disabled child. That night, she came to where I was staying with my partner, demanded my sister's clothes, and pointed a knife at me, threatening to kill us as well.

I reported this at Mafatsane police station. The officer listened and then told everyone there, "here's a child who came to arrest her mother." They made me repeat my statement and questioned my motives. They said my baby's case was irrelevant, because my mother did not make the statements to me, but to my colleague. So, they said, we must come with a better offence.

They neither took a statement, nor opened a case. A female officer asked me about why I am staying with my boyfriend so young, and said that she was going to abuse me as well and I "mustn't come here to report that."

My mother has used all my life points - church, family, friends, against me. Now she says I must forgive her. The police failed me. Is there help out there?

Ending violence, a step at a time



Without a home of my own

Cindy Ndlovu,* South Africa

I started living with my husband in 1984, and we were in love and were very happy. The problem started after we got married in 2004, when he became ill. In 2005 he started beating me and forcing me to have sex with him even when I told him I was not well. He accused me of having another man, and hit me so hard that I ended up at the clinic to get help for my husband. Indeed they did not help me for they wrote me a referral letter to take him to Baragwanath Hospital.

He stayed in hospital for a whole month because they suspected that he was losing his mind. He was hitting children for no apparent reason and hiding food, saying the children must not eat because they are wasteful, he even locked the food away. When we asked for food he fought and chased us outside.

I found myself a job but he refused to let me work because he said I had an affair. He came with policemen to my place of employment, when I asked what I had done the police just said to me: "Get inside the van we will speak at the police station". When we arrived at the station he said he wanted the policemen to talk to us because I disrespect him at home. When I came home I found he had hidden all my belongings including my identity document, marriage certificate and the house documents.

I asked the police to ask him to give me my documents. He returned them. The police suggested he go for another medical evaluation. At the hospital the doctors said he was epileptic and I should just get used to his behaviour. He only behaved that way with family no one else. I am confused: is he really ill or just being very abusive?

I do not have anyone to rely on; that is why I stay in this abusive situation and because of my children as well. My mother separated from my father when we were still young, my grandmother and my uncles brought me
up. My mother worked as a domestic worker. When my grandmother passed away, we had nowhere to go.

At this time my mother was married to a man who was kind to us, never discriminated against us and allowed us to stay with them at his house. The problem came when he also passed away; there were misunderstandings amongst his children and we had to go stay with my mother's aunt. Even there life was not good, as we had to fend for ourselves.

That is why I am in my marriage, because this marriage has lasted even when things were not right. I have nowhere to go. My husband has a daughter from another woman. He lied to me and told me that the child's grandmother asked him to take her, as her mother does not provide anything, and I agreed because I felt the child is innocent.

The child was only three years old then. Our relationship with the child was not a good one; she did things that broke my heart but I told myself that I will continue raising her. Out of spite, she would put her excretion under the pillows. When I asked why she did that she just stared at me. Today she is 20 years old and carries on with this strange behaviour.

My life is becoming more difficult; I can feel the brunt of not having your own home because if I had a home and family that protects me I would not withstand all this abuse. I know that social workers do their work because I went to them and they referred me to NISAA where I got help. I am thankful to NISAA because at least things are better even if the situation is not as I would like it to be.

I am unemployed together with my husband; we do not have food because there is no one who is assisting us. I have a young child of 11 years and a daughter who is married. She lives in a shack somewhere with her husband and wants nothing to do with us. I am emotionally drained. Even now I know that my HIV positive step daughter will become my responsibility when she gets ill.

Ever since I came to this workshop I fell empowered, I can speak up against abuse. I am able to tell my husband to stop abusing my children and me. Recently my husband ordered our 11-year-old son to make our bed. He wakes up late, long after I leave. I feel my child should be protected from such things and told my husband to leave our son alone.

** not her real name*

Taking a stand

By Gladys Dlamini,* South Africa

I am 47 years old, married with children. I have a son and two daughters age 24, 19 and 14. I got married at the age of 19. When I got married I was already working. I started to work at the age of 15. I come from a poor family. My parents drink heavily and used to fight every day. When I grew up I looked for a job. When I married I had been working for four years. In our culture or tradition women must bow down and worship their husband as king. I had to give him my salary even though he was working too. He earned a lower salary than me.

That was where the jealousy started because I was earning more money than him. I complained about giving him my salary because both of us are earning. He said that he paid lobola for me and everything I have is his and everything he has is mine. In reality it was not like that because he took all my salary and never shared his salary with me. I complained to his parents. They used to say have courage, one day it will be alright. He started to drink, he used to get drunk every Friday. He would come from work drunk and ask me for food and money. When I refuse he beats me. I used to sleep outside to hide.

I ran away to my mother's house and stayed there for two months. He begged me to come back home. My parents said I must go with him. I told my mother he will beat me again and she said he would not beat me again.

When we arrived home he told his parents that I am stubborn and I do not want to listen to him. He called me names and was drunk; my mother in law said I must not answer him because he was drunk, so I kept quiet until the next morning. He asked me for money because he had a headache and needed some tablets. When I asked "where is your money", he started to fight again. I said to him you told my parents you would not do this again, but you started again. He said you made me angry because you refused to buy me tablets for a headache.

I used to respect him as my husband. Since he started abusing me I have no respect for him at all. He stopped me from visiting my family and friends. He said I am wasting money by visiting.

He forced me to have sex with him. If I said I was tired he forced me or beat and said he paid lobola for me. I must give him anything that he wants. He said he married me for sex. So I have to do what he wants just to make him happy. Every morning he wanted breakfast even though there was no food at all.

In 1984 when my son was one year old my husband decided to leave his job. I said how could you do this, he said he wanted to go to school. I continued to work. He asked me for money for transport and food. The burden was on me because I had to look after my son and his father.

He went to school for one year only. After that he said he wanted to go to driving school. Again, I paid all the costs for driving lessons. When he needed money for something he would fight with me. I used to give him money because I was afraid of being beaten. If I asked him anything such as how was your day, his answer was its not your business, bring me food. I want to eat, I am hungry. I would have to rush around and make food for him.

After he got his licence he started a job as a driver and was working five days a week. Every Friday he would shout and say open the door while banging on the door. I would get very scared and do not know whether to open the door or not.

In 1991 we bought a house and by now I had daughter. I had lost my job in 1988 and decided to use some of my package to pay for the house. We arrived at the office to pay for the house and it was closed. The following day I was tired and decided to stay home and have a rest. My husband went to pay for the house alone. He took the cheque for R30 000 and disappeared for two months. I asked him where the money was and where he had disappeared to. He just sat down and kept quiet. I started to shout at him; he became really angry and hit me.

One day I told my sister about my life. My sister said that it was time to get a lawyer and divorce. The lawyer began the process and found out that my husband used the R30 000 to go overseas. In 1995 I received the decree of divorce but we still lived together.

My husband started an affair and had sex with this woman in my bed in front of me.

My husband was working but did not give me money to buy food for the children. My children were affected because they saw what was happening. My son hates his dad because his best friend is his dad's girlfriend's son. Both boys got very angry and wanted to beat my husband and his girlfriend. I stopped them and told them violence does not change anything.

After I came to the "I" stories workshop I went home and told my husband about the experience. I told him I am aware of my rights and that there are places I can go to for help. He was surprised and started to say that everything will change. He became afraid and his blood pressure rose and he had to be admitted to hospital. While he was there I asked about all his policies and he gave me access to all of them. I will not allow him to beat me anymore.

** not her real name*

Where to from here ?



By Genevieve, South Africa

I found her body at the tender age of 14 - no note to say good-bye or why. My mother was suddenly gone. Where to from here?

Some days later, I had to return to the dank and musty house, not like I had remembered it. I took a few of my personal belongings and a contact diary of her friends, in the hope I would not be alone. Realisation started setting in. "She took her life," I had to repeat over and over again to each and every one of them... four little words, piercing my soul each time I said them!

Twenty days later, 155kms away from home - what is this place they call "a school of industries?" No friendly faces, my mind swirling... why, why, why must I stay here ?

For the next seven days, they beat me up every day. Shower time was the worst, soap in socks, planks and belts were the weapons they used to beat us. Seven white girls against 86 black girls, there was no chance of survival!

After seven days, I had enough! I decided to fight back and did not care what the consequences. We were seven white girls standing with our backs against the wall, water running down our bruised, naked bodies, staring fearfully into the eyes of 86 black girls. Zinky was almost 6 foot tall and weighed about 90kgs compared to my small 60kg frame.

I stepped forward... thoughts of my finding Mom, lying in the car... why did she do it? The thoughts filling me with heartache and such bitter anger, what had I to lose? I stepped forward, holding Zinky's snarling glare. We only fought for about 6 minutes but it felt like it would never end. I earned respect that day. From then I thought that this is the only way to gain respect in life.

I hated the school, the people, and the situation. I kept dreaming that my mom was coming to fetch me, to take me away from all the bullies to somewhere where I would be safe. I thought to myself every day, why me? I often sat alone and, if I was with other fellow students, I pretended to be happy.

I could not allow myself to be weak. If you were weak, the girls' bullying was relentless. I never had the chance to deal with my Moms' death... ever. Many nights I would wait for everyone to be asleep, I would go to the bathroom and cry for hours because I had no one to help me get through the pain.

Every school holiday was difficult for me... I had no family to go to. Not even my dad, who is alive and well. Lying in bed one evening, I thought to myself, if I just gave up and failed matric, I would, at least, be able to stay in the school for another year, which meant a roof over my head and a plate of food every day for at least one more year.

I realised I had to make something of myself and decided to rather prove to myself and everyone else that I could do it. As the end of matric approached I became more and more scared, not of whether I passed or failed, but where I would go. Where would I stay, what would I eat, what was going to happen to me? I had nowhere to go and no one to help me. My ongoing question was... where to from here?

My time was up at the school and, as the school gate closed behind me, I stood on the R103 with my small bag, which was the only thing I owned in the whole world, thinking that the constant struggle and abuse is finally over – but where to now?

I walked for about 2 hours to the nearest town, hoping against all hope that I would find a place to stay. I knocked on doors and asked people for a place to stay until I was able to find work and a place of my own... a place to call 'home'. A lot of people looked at me strangely, as if to say "Why don't you just go home?".

'NO!' was the answer at all the homes. My first night, my second night, and then my third night, I found the town cemetery and slept within the graves, knowing it would be the safest place to sleep. Not getting much sleep as it poured down with rain every night, I kept thinking to myself how my life had changed for the worst, and thinking that it would never get better.

I was alone, I was scared and wished that I could be back at that dreadful school, I would have taken that abuse just for a mattress, a warm duvet and I would have been dry. Cold, wet and starving, I awoke and again ventured off to find a place to stay. Finally, a kind-hearted lady opened her home to me.

I had passed matric with exemption, yet three weeks passed and I still had no job. One evening, my kind-hearted saviour went out. Her husband entered the bathroom whilst I was undressing. He told me that I had been staying in his house free, and I needed to repay him. He pulled down his pants and said, "This is the only way you can repay me to stay in my house."

His facial expression was hard and sickening, it was to me as if I was looking straight into the eyes of Satan. I thought to myself, "What do I do?" I packed my measly belongings. Once again I asked myself - where to from here? So I headed back to the safety of the graveyard again.

Men offered me a place to stay. The price, as I now gathered, was sexual favours! I could not allow them to use me that way! Living on the streets was not easy. I grew up with a roof over my head, a warm bed, security. Things I had taken for granted had now been taken from me in such a short time.

I slept many nights in the graveyard, which had now become my home. I bathed at petrol stations, I begged for money so that I could eat. Finally, I found work as a waitress at a coffee shop. Things seemed to coming together for me; the only thing now was to find a place to stay.

I told my boss about my living conditions; she was so shocked. She was unaware that I was sleeping on the streets and still coming to work everyday. She told me that I was welcome to stay with her. I grabbed the opportunity with open arms, like a hungry child grabbing a morsel of bread.

I worked there for about 2 months, but this woman took advantage of me. I had to work all day, be her babysitter at nights, cook most meals in the evenings, and she did not feel that she had to pay me. I felt like a slave, but at least I had a roof over my head. However, I was hungry for even the smallest 'tip' to buy personal toiletries.

One day, my boss had an argument with a female customer, Debi, whom I had befriended. My boss told me that if I ever spoke to Debi, or served her in the coffee shop, she would fire me. I told my boss she was being unfair as I was not arguing with Debi, she was.

My boss could not accept this and told me to pack my bags and f***k off. So... once again, I packed my belongings and headed for the streets. I now thought at this stage that I was worth nothing, my purpose on earth was to suffer and, if I died, no one would even care! They would just throw my body in a hole and they would carry on with their happy-go-lucky lives. This time my values saved me. Debi, who I was supposedly not allowed to talk to, accepted me into her home. She had recently lost her husband. I thought at least this time no one would ask me to sleep with someone for a place to stay nor for a plate of food.

This time was different; I always kept my guard up and never got too comfortable. I never even unpacked my bag because, in the back of my mind, I thought I would not be here long, why unpack only to be kicked out again?

I worked for Debi around the house and she paid me! Our friendship grew strong. Debi was, and still is, like my second mother. One day, Debi did something so surprising; she arranged for me to board in a commune and paid my rent, whilst giving me a salary. I then knew for sure God was watching over me.

It was time to strike out on my own. I fell in love. But the situation changed quickly and I found myself in an abusive relationship, physically and mentally. I often feel I cannot leave, as I have nowhere to go; I am dependent on him.

But I have decided to change my life. I have the support that I, for so long have craved, which gives me the opportunity finally to say, "I now know... where to from here." I WILL make it in life as I have regained my confidence and I WON'T allow another man, or women, to "push me around."

Waking up after the nightmare

By Tamara Naidoo,* South Africa

I am a 25-year-old Muslim girl who was born and brought up in Kwa Zulu Natal . At the age of 19 I was very independent, had a good job, friends, and family. I met a 25-year old guy who promised me the world, a queen's life. I wasn't ready for marriage so I told him we should date, and then see where our love takes us.

I dated him for two years before we got married, and he was caring, loving, and supporting. My family did the whole wedding and furnished our home. My Dad bought me a car as a gift. That's when I thought my dreams would come true. Just two weeks into the marriage, the nightmare began.

He become very verbally, then physically abusive – always to my body, not my face. I would ask why, but he never gave any answers. It went on for 2 months non-stop, till he packed his clothes and walked out. My family told me to come back home.

It was hard to get over what happened, but with my family's support I was ok. It would have been our first anniversary when he came back and told me he was sorry for what happened. He wanted another chance. He begged and pleaded, and I fell for it. I packed a few clothes and went with him to Durban.

Life was good for a week. He took a truck to pick up all my furniture that I put in storage, and he promised my family things will be ok between us. Yet again things were great for 2 weeks. Then he started abusing me again. When he would "apologies," he would want to sleep with me.

There was one week that things were ok. He took me out to dinner and movies, and was very loving and caring. One morning he kissed me on his way to work, saying he loves me and "see you later." Two hours later two police in uniform knocked on the door, handed over a protection order and arrest warrant. They told me to leave the premises immediately.

I called my husband. He told me to go back to my family. He doesn't want me anymore and used me to get all my furniture. The protection order said I used to abuse and sexually harass him, that I was having an affair with a 17-year-old boy, and using drugs at our home. I jumped in my car and left.

I tried to call him that evening, but he didn't take my calls. I went home that evening, begging to know what I did. He slammed the door on my hand, saying get out.

He pushed me and I fell and cracked my head. When he saw me in pain he told me to come in and talk. I went in and he wanted to have sex. I said no, and he said he loved me and when I insisted no, he headed me into the bedroom and put himself in me while holding me down and covering my mouth.

After, he said he loved me and things will be ok. He sent me to Pietermaritzburg the next morning to see my family and to give them money. My mum saw there was something wrong, so I told her what my husband had done. She was shocked with nothing to say, and told me stay back or he would kill me.

I did not listen. When I returned home I was shocked to find all the locks changed. He called me saying get out of his house, he doesn't want me. The next day I went to the police to open a rape and abuse case against him. They arrested him.

Yet again my family called me back home. They gave me love and support through my hard pain. It was hard for me to get over what had happened. After one and half years, I decided to make a new start. So in April 2007, I moved to Johannesburg.

Through a friend I met someone who was looking for someone to do admin work. He offered me a salary, his flat to share. I did not mean for it to happen, but we hit it off.

I told him all about my past and he told me about his. He had been married twice, had three children from the first wife. The eldest was sixteen. He lives on his own, not with family, and he can't stay with his mum. They don't get along.

Everyone who knew us thought we were the perfect couple. On 30 June 2007, we decided to get married with our parents blessing. We also found out that I was pregnant with my 1st baby. We were excited and happy.

When the doctor put me on bed rest because of some complications, my husband loved, cared, washed, did everything for me. However, soon after that, he changed towards me, becoming verbally abuse.

His family stayed across the street from us and they began spying on me, and also being verbally abusive. At the beginning of October 2007, we had a fight that ended with him telling me to get out of his house.

I jumped in my car to cool off. I waited until he phoned me to come back home that morning about 3:30 am. When I came in, I only asked him why he was looking at me like that, when he jumped from the bed, pushing me around.

I pulled a knife that he keeps under his pillow to defend myself. During a struggle, I was knocked out, and when I woke up, I heard him calling the police. 3 male and 1 female police officers in uniform came. He then told them I was on drugs and that I used to abuse my ex-husband.

They told me I must put my shoes and come with them to the station. I told them I did nothing wrong, I'm not leaving my house. Then I went back to sit on the bed. The police woman pulled me off the bed, as I screamed in pain and told her I was pregnant. I fell as she dragged me to the door.

My husband told her to leave me, that I was pregnant, and that he will bring me to the station. When they left he told me to take my things and get out. We quarrelled some more, but then he asked me to forgive him and to try and work things out. We made love.

However, things never changed. The next day, his family continued to be abusive to me. His aunty accused me of abusing him, and that the baby was not his. She also knew all about my past, that I told him in detail. One day after a big quarrel with his family, he told me my things are packed and I must pick them up. I told him no we must meet and he can give me my things.

When we met he cried and pleaded saying don't go, let's work this marriage out, he loves me. He told me he was going home to pack his things, to find somewhere else to stay. But it was another lie. I had nowhere to go, so I slept in my car and washed up at malls for three weeks. I couldn't take it anymore, for my babies' health I went to NISAA. They fed me and gave me a place to stay.

Nissaa tried to call my husband. He told them he wants nothing to do with me, that I'm mad, suicidal, abusive, swear at his family and hate his children, that I stole his car keys and camera.

Its been a month of living hell for me, thinking things will be ok and taking his promises. He made me live my whole past in detail, he repeated it. He breaks me to pieces, setting me up, taking his mums and family's word over mine. What goes around comes around. It's in Gods hands now. With the help and support from NISAA I now can start my life again.

For other women, I want to say when you get into a new relationship be independent, work, and have an income. Remember your family will always be your family and they will always love you. Live life don't let life live you.

* not her real name

Now I see the light

By Lindiwe Ngoya*, South Africa

For thirty-seven years, I chose to be a victim of abuse not because I wanted to, but because in my mind I felt I needed to protect my children from being deprived of growing up without their father. I had grown up without my father, and did not want the same for my children.

I got married on the 26th of March 1973, after three years of living together with my boyfriend. In the beginning, we had more happy times than sad times. One day the relationship took a wrong turn. I spent many years trying so hard to please the man in my life at the expense of my own happiness. On the contrary, my husband did not go out of his way to understand me.

He had no clue as to what I liked or disliked. I also did not take it upon myself to inform him or express myself about anything because I was scared of him. I would do anything to please him, for the sake of peace in our home.

During weekends he would get drunk, come back home and start a fight, if not with me then it would be the children. We would scream and the neighbours would hear it but did not offer any help. They were also afraid of him, as he would threaten to sue them. As a person conversant with the legal system, he was aware of the loopholes and would use these to his advantage. He could start a fight but rush to report to the police before anyone could.

At some point, I got tired of the abuse and pretending to be happy. He did not understand the sudden change of my behaviour so he started accusing my relatives and friends of influencing me. As a result, he stopped me from visiting my relatives and friends. He allowed no visitors to enter my yard and instructed me to keep the gates locked every day without fail. . My home became a prison.

I was so isolated to the extent that I could not even attend my cousin's funeral in Carltonville. Instead, he went and demanded the grave number so that he could take me there on his own time. When a cousin-in-law politely asked him to take me to the grave site he refused and had the guts to come back and relate the story.

As time went by, he started leaving for days without telling me where he was going. I would remain with our four children with nothing to feed them. I felt lonely and rejected. I related my story to the church and they maintained us. At that time, there was no sign of hope and all I had was the piercing pain in my heart. I found strength in God and that with him nothing is impossible; he would rescue me one day.

My husband would disappear for days and then appear from time to time to check if I am still living alone with the children. It was difficult for me to explainhis whereabouts to my children, for they were young but I managed to lie. I told them that he was working over time in various countries.

Since the children were also not allowed to play outside the yard, other children mocked them. They would laugh at them saying that they were like animals in a cage. This affected them to the extent that they ended up fighting those who mocked them, even if it meant jumping over the fence just to fight back. When they saw their father's car approaching, they would start climbing the fence like spiders to get back to the house. In some instances he caught them and beat them with a belt for getting out of the yard.

After beating up the children, he would open the gate and beat me for letting them go out. He never even cared to ask for the reason why they were out of the yard. For him it was a way of expressing his manhood. What was even more frustrating was that after beating up the children, a few minutes later he would change his mood and start playing with the children and talking to us as if nothing happened. He expected us to adjust to his moods, to suit him.

I lost hope. I felt absolutely alone and a failure for not being able to protect my children. I did not have anyone to turn to. I decided to escape with two of my children from Johannesburg to Eastern Cape, leaving the older one behind. This haunted me and I started having bad dreams and hallucinations.

Each time I heard a sound of a car similar to his, I would run to peep through the window even though he was far away. I felt terrified and it became worse when he summoned my family to send me back within two days or I will regret the day I met him. To avoid further confrontation I went back home. I kept reminding myself that I needed to be strong and face the challenges.

In 1985, he left our home. For seven years, he only came around when he felt like beating us. In 1992, he decided to come back, not because he regretted his deeds but to finish us off. Unwittingly I welcomed him, thinking he had reformed.

To start with, he persuaded me into selling the house promising to buy us a plot elsewhere. The first transaction failed but he later managed to sell the house without my knowledge. I only got to know a few days later, after his departure, when a sheriff delivered a letter to inform us to be out of the house in the next few months.

In his absence, I lost two of my children. My husband abused me and as a result I suffered from depression. A friend of mine then suggested that I should go to People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) for counselling because she had found them before when she faced a similar situation.

It took me 37 years to realise that I had opted for the wrong choice, but I am grateful that I finally saw the light. My husband did not want to see me progressing in my life. He preferred to see me as a stagnant housewife and yet I am a woman with multiple talents. Today I am a proud woman and thank God for my friend and POWA for their support and for believing in me.

** not her real name*



I have found my voice



Annah Maduma Matshidiso, South Africa

I met this guy on 11th November 1992. I was only 17 years old. We started dating until I became pregnant in 1993. He asked to marry me and I agreed. We were blessed with a baby boy and that added to the joy. Then in 1996 he started cheating on me with another woman. He left home and started live in a nearby suburb with his new lady. He stopped maintaining me and his son.

I began to struggle to raise my child and got assistance from my parents. In September 1997 he wanted to come back to me and I refused. He tried to enlist my mother to convince me to forgive him. He argued that I should take him back since he had paid lobola and was the father of my child. He also used that our child is mentally disabled to blackmail me. I eventually forgave him. Things went back to normal and we were happy for almost a year. I was convinced that he had changed. In 1998 he bought me a ring telling me that he loved me and he wanted to wed. In 1999 I fell pregnant with our second child. When I told him he said that he wanted me to move in with him and asked my mother to release me to go and live with him.

We started living together with his brother at his place. After a while his brother started ill-treating me. I tried to explain to my husband about the situation so he could sit us down resolve our misunderstandings amicably. My husband refused to cooperate saying that he was going to talk to his brother alone. After about four months his brother moved out. My husband pretended to be fine with the situation and kept everything to himself. Close to the delivery date I went to stay at my mother's place so that she would assist me with taking care of the baby for a month. When I delivered the baby he did not buy clothes or anything for the newborn as he claimed that he had no money. He eventually bought a few items. But even worse he sent his aunt to tell my mother to keep me at her place because he did not want me back. He even stopped visiting his children. After four months he phoned me out of the blue asking me to pack my bags and come back home. Because I still loved the father of my children and wanted them to be raised by both of us, I fell for it.

Later that year we were offered a house by my sister and moved there. Everything seemed to be going well. In 2001 we went to wed at the magistrate court. After that he started cheating on me again with another woman but I chose to ignore this. I was accused of going to my mother's place too often and that she was influencing me. My brothers and sisters were not allowed to visit me at my place.

My husband became a stranger in our own home. He lied that he was going to work meetings for weeks on end. But there was a pattern to it. He went away every Wednesday and came back on Sunday. When I asked him about the meetings he would accuse me of taking him out of his parent's house to live at my sister's

house so that I could control him.
I remember one day after his pay day he beat with his belt and left the house soon after. I cried in front of my children. I could not cook for them because there was no electricity. When he went out of the house I thought he was going to pay for electricity but he did not. Instead all the money had been spent on a girlfriend. On the 7th of July 2002 my husband told me he had an affair with a lady from Mafikeng and asked me for a divorce so that he could marry the woman he loves.

He asked me, "Are you going to allow me to divorce you and make you my second wife because I think you won't live under the same roof with this woman". It was obviously because the lady had her own house. When he asked me if I was willing to share him with another woman I felt like I was having a nightmare that would soon pass.

He stopped caring for the family. When I asked him to buy clothes for the kids he argued that he was the one working so he needed to look good unlike the kids who stay at home. He always said he did not have money. But when he went for these 'meetings' he always bought gifts for his girlfriend and put them on top of the wardrobe.

I remember one day I went to the doctor with our son and instead of empathising he accused me of not telling him that I was going to the hospital. I responded and I said to him, "Can we talk about your behaviour because you told me not to do washing for you, you no longer eat my food, no longer give me money since I am your wife I have the right to know". He said to me, "I don't want to talk to you". I insisted and he said, "Phuman Kimi" still I insisted that he talk to me. That is when he started beating me up.

The next day he went to work leaving me with bruises on my face. He would not even admit it to his brothers and told them that I had started the fight. Three days later he demanded our marriage certificate so that he could file for a divorce.

This pattern of abuse continued. He insulted me, calling me names and accusing me of stealing his payslips. I could not stand it anymore and agreed to the divorce. In March 2003 the summons was delivered to me. On 25th of September we went to court and divorced. We were supposed to share the furniture, but he took everything I had selected because he had bought everything since I was not working. He only left old things for me. I filed for maintenance. I have since started receiving the maintenance money for our children, but I had to fight for it. It was a difficult process.

I heard about NISAA Institute for Women Development and attended sessions there. I received training for basic counselling and I did the advanced skills. My life has since changed and I am a happy woman. I am able to go to the shops and buy groceries for my children, unlike when I lived with my husband and had to rely on him for everything because he never gave me a cent.

* not her real name

Finding myself again

By Nicole Alexandra Rice. South Africa

I am back. I feel there is life in me again. When I look back, when my thoughts drift to the past, I don't recognise who I was then. The person he made me wasn't the independent energetic woman I knew. He changed me in a way I never thought was possible.

Once I had matriculated, aged 18, I decided to venture out into the world. I felt I wasn't ready to study at university, which required choosing a career path for the rest of my life. It turned out, however, that I wasn't ready for what was to come either.

In January 2004, I boarded a plane to the United Kingdom, which I made my home for the next year and eight months. Here I met a man who I fell desperately in love with and we moved in together soon after. He became verbally abusive and controlling, and after being together for a year, he started physically abusing me.

He brought the worst out of me. In love with him, I forgave him even as his fist made contact with my body and his words wormed their way into my head. He broke my bones, he blackened my eye, he scarred my body and broke my spirit.

Yet, I forgave him because I loved him, and I still forgive him because in some ways I still love him. I thought I could never leave him, because I loved him and because he would change. I thought no one else would ever love me, would ever accept my flaws and love me as he did. This is what I believed.

I remember the pain, the unending pain, not physical pain caused by his fists, but emotional pain. The hurt and anguish that I suffered because he was capable of hurting me, and because I was imperfect, though I tried so hard to be perfect. I continuously blamed myself, I believed it was me who had to change. I believed I was the one who was flawed.

I stayed with him for just over two years in total. Even when I left the United Kingdom to return to South Africa in October 2005 to study and pursue a degree, I remained in a relationship with him. Separated by an ocean and miles apart he fought to remain in control. He kept me in his grip with words that distorted my perspective.

Surrounded by the love of family and friends I was finally able to come to a realisation, an awakening. The flaw did not lie with me it lay with him. I realised that I am worth more. I freed myself from his grip and breathed life again. I filled my lungs with air that was not intoxicated by his poisonous words. I gained the strength to tear myself away from him and from the love I felt. I needed to love myself, respect myself.

Eventually, I gained the courage to end the relationship on 4 June 2006. He retaliated by committing suicide, dying that same day. He tried to punish me when I broke free. He hoped he'd weaken me. I feel that he took his own life just to spite me, so he could haunt me, and cast a shadow over me for the rest of my life. I feel he selfishly did this with utter disregard for the hurt and pain he caused me and his family - mother, father, sister and half siblings who share in the loss and pain that I do.

I will not let him succeed. I will fight this battle and I will not submit as I did when I allowed him to abuse me by staying after the first time he hit me - a punch to the jaw - and after every hit and harsh word thereafter. It is an uphill battle that at times feels impossible.

I hurt and I struggle daily, consoling myself. My head swims with only the good memories of him, memories that idolise him and distort the truth. They swell the wound and magnify the pain that I feel for his loss. A flawed reflection of the past, the memories burden me with regrets and longing.

I learnt that abuse has no preference, it discriminates against no one; it happened to me regardless of my race, my education, or upbringing. The grip of his abuse was hard to release. Threats, mixed with acts of love and kindness, left me confused. I miss him, I always will, but it's a cost I am willing to pay. It is far less than the cost I paid loving him, staying with him. That cost was my life and my dignity.

Now that I have my life back and now that I am stronger than before I am willing to miss him, I am willing to pay that price, which previously I feared far more than I feared him. He would be disappointed. I stand here, back again, full of life, stronger than before.

Speak Out! The courage to heal from child sexual abuse

By: Jane Katjaimo*, Namibia

I am a 33-year-old survivor of child sexual abuse and rape. I never thought that I would be able to face the world again after the experiences I've had to deal with in my life. Since the age 5-8, I have been in the dark spaces of child sexual abuse committed by a paternal uncle.

In sharing my story today, through the power of this pen, it does not hurt me as much as it once did, because I have made peace with myself, my past and the ones who trespassed against me. Therefore, I do not regard myself as a victim, but as a survivor.

Since I became educated and knowledgeable about my rights, this knowledge facilitated a process of self-empowerment where I became able to assert and claim my rights.

Currently I am a Human Rights and Gender Activist. In writing my story, I have tried to remind myself that I am a human being too, capable of feelings of bitterness, hatred and fear, but also of love, of compassion, humility and of forgiveness.

The writing of my story is still part of the healing process and I hope not only that, but to lighten the burden that so many of my fellow men and women, especially children carry. By sharing my story today, I do not claim to have solutions by eliminating sexual abuse or rape, but I might be able to give you a dream to live by: speak out! Have the courage to heal.

As we travel through life, we should remember that life is a journey with many ups and downs. I experienced laughter, love, joy, tear and hurt at different stages of my journey through life. Along my way, I interact with other human beings and at times of joy, I celebrated love and life and it felt great to be a human being.

However, at times I had bitter and painful experiences and thought that life is brutal, unfair and bitterness determined my language and approach to life. Like in many time in my life, I have asked: 'Why should this happen to me?" and I viewed him who hurt me as inhuman. At a stage in my life, I heard with a broken heart, I saw with clouded visions and my mind could no longer think of the good.

I stopped laughing and loving, and allowed hatred to overwhelm me. But before I fell too far into the quicksand of hatred, revenge or just calling it quits, the God Almighty had mercy on me and gave me the courage to heal.

I realised one thing, that it is never too late to change. In order for me to heal, I took revenge by putting my negative past behind, asserting myself to be a successful career women.

Therefore, I am no longer burdened with the heartbreak of my experiences during my childhood days. To me it is something of the past, I have moved on with my life! I am working for a positive life in the present and the future.

I am writing this story with the aim of telling you that you are not alone and that there are places you can go to for help. It is normal to be concerned about what people will say, but it's your life and you must fight for it.

The only person who can change the situation is you. Tell someone you trust. I did and have no regrets. It did not cost me my life before I made that decision. I chose to live just as I choose to tell you my story in the hope that it will make a difference.

I choose to speak out and to take a stand, therefore I am calling on you dear reader, especially children: Speak out! Find a voice. Claim your space and use that space to say: 'my voice has value."

By speaking out, you will be able to take charge of your life while you can, and that will give you the courage to heal.

** not her real name.*

Healing on the outside, but still scarred within

By Harriet Nhlapo, South Africa

My name is Harriet Nhlapo, born on 23 March 1959 in Phiri, Soweto. In 1978, when I was 19, I met this handsome guy, and fell head-over-heels in love with him. A year later, I was fortunate to find a job, and worked at OK Bazaar as a cashier.

We married in 1982 and were blessed with a gorgeous baby boy who I named Sibusiso, meaning a blessing. We lived happily for a period of five years.

Then, very suddenly, my husband's behaviour changed. He started drinking, going out with his so-called "friends" and coming home late. He started accusing me of coming home later than the usual time.

Even when I tried to explain the delays, caused by trains running late, he suspected that I was having an affair. He would beat me up using any object he came across. This continued for almost three years and it happened even in front of his parents. Any intervention from his mother was in vain, as he would beat her as well.

I tried on four occasions to report the matter to the police and could not get any help. The house we were living in with his family was a shebeen, so they had "connections" with the same police. The police officers used to tell us to go back home and sort out our differences.

In one instance, in dismay, the police picked me up at my workplace, to the embarrassment of my colleagues, on allegations of having sent to steal from the house. I moved from being a victim to a perpetrator.

The beatings went on and on, to an extent where I was stabbed with a knife several times on my body and face. I stayed with the hope that things would eventually change. The worst incident was when he beat me with a "Panga," which left me with a terrible scar on my head.

I used to lie to my family and friends (because I was not the same person I used to be), who would see me with bruises. I claimed to have bumped into the door.

One day in August 1989, it went on almost the whole night! Our neighbours called the police, but they never responded. An ambulance picked me up. I suffered severe injuries on my ribs and my left arm. I was hospitalised for three months in Lenasia Hospital.

He purposely avoided taking me to Baragwanath Hospital where it would have been more convenient for me to open a case against him while I was hospitalised. When the hospital discharged me, I had to attend physiotherapy twice a week because my injured hand could not function properly. This still affects me even today. While I was in the hospital, he burnt all my clothes!

In the midst of events, I still opened a case of assault against him and nothing happened. The police never did anything about it. Finally, I decided that ENOUGH IS ENOUGH – I moved out of that marriage and eventually divorced him.

Whilst all of this occurred, in my mind, I had this vision that if only my mother was alive, I would not have suffered this long. My mother became ill and passed away when I was just fourteen years old. From then onwards, my father alone raised me.

When I was doing grade 11, I had to leave school because my father was suddenly unemployed and was not able to pay for my school fees anymore. When I left my husband and moved back to my father's house, I went back to work. I also decided to enrich myself intellectually by finally completing Grade 12.

I am happy that I got out of the relationship, but I still carry the scars with me today. Healing the scars on the outside is much easier than those on the inside. It is difficult to trust again.

Finally, I have come to realise that a person should not stay in an abusive relationship; instead, one should speak up and seek help. This influenced me to have a feeling to help others.

Initially I wanted to become a social worker but could not afford the fees. I spoke to a friend who told me about NISAA, which is an institution dealing with issues of women abuse.

I decided to do this course to help other women not to be trapped in the same situation. Women must know that there is help out there for them.



365 Days of Action
against gender violence

16 days for life

EQUALITY IS KEY





Khuluma, Bua, Speak Out!



gender links

GEMSA
Gender and Media Southern Africa

POWA
PEOPLE OPPOSING WOMEN ABUSE

HIVOS

FORUM FOR WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT
FORUM FOR KVINNER OG UTVIKLINGSPØRSMÅL
FOKUS