The "I" Stories

Namibian girls come out of the box on gender based violence

Speak out - set me free

Volume 2

2008

"Healing through the power of the pen



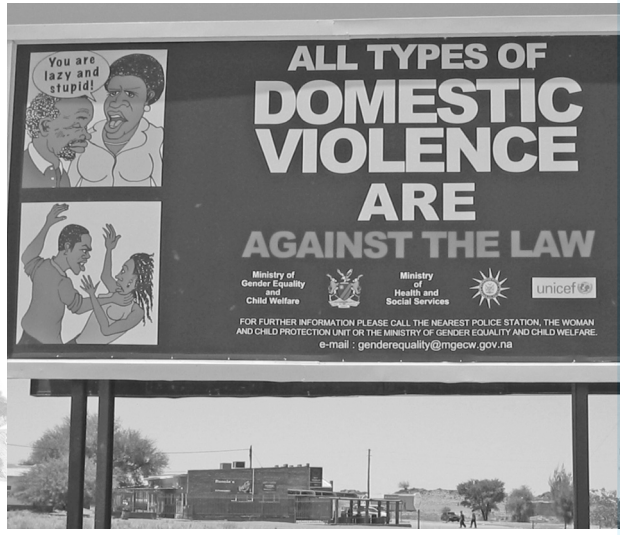
The “I” Stories is an annual project of Gender Links (GL), in collaboration with partnering organisations, to share first hand accounts of women and men affected by gender based violence. GL is a Southern African non-governmental organisation committed to a region in which women and men are able to realise their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of public and private life.

The Gender and Media Southern African (GEMSA) Network is an umbrella organisation of individuals and institutions who work to promote gender equality in and through the media. GEMSA Namibia was established on 26 May 2005.

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GEMSANaM Media literacy graduates *Photo: Sarry Xoagus-Eises*



Spreading the word against gender violence *Photo: Gender Links*



Ama Buruxa cultural group *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

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* all of the contributors in this volume of the *"I" Stories* have chosen to remain anonymous

Acknowledgements

We salute all the gallant girls who came out in big numbers to educate other girls in the region, especially Namibian girls, to speak out against all forms of gender-based violence. It was not easy to bring this diverse group together under the same roof to tell their stories. These are stories of rape, incest, domestic and psychological violence, HIV and AIDS, sex work and many other forms of violence. These stories share the pain and frustrations that these girls have undergone. All stories are highly valued by Gender Links, regional GEMSA and their chapter GEMSANaM.

Loveness Jambaya Nyakujarah of Gender Links co-ordinated the overall project as part of a regional Sixteen Days series of *"I" Stories* booklets to make every voice count in the region. Countries that participated include Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. A regional booklet will also be produced featuring stories from across Southern and East Africa, to be launched in 2009.

The board of GEMSANaM thanks GEMSA, Gender Links, the Department for International Development (DFiD) UK and FOKUS (Norway), and especially the Namibian Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare for making it possible for these young women to be heard through the power of the pen. We believe these first hand stories offer direction and inspiration to other girls in the region who have not yet spoken out against violence inflicted on them on daily basis.



Agnes Odhiambo and Loveness Jambaya Nyakujarah, Take Back the Night South Africa *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

Healing through stories...

We would like to thank the local chapter, GEMSANaM, regional GEMSA and Gender Links for working together with the women's groups and the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare to carry out activities to highlight gender violence. Last year we witnessed the launched of the first ever *"I" Stories* in Namibia, and this year we are again proud to be associated with this important initiative to produce this booklet, which forms part of a strategy to bring gender violence out into the open, as a way of combating the problem.

This year, the focus is on girls and young women, with the aim of raising awareness and informing government, and in particular the Ministry of Gender, of the plight of these girls. These girls write about their own lives. Lives that have been hijacked, infringed and violated by, sometimes, those who are very, very, close to them.

As a way forward, GEMSANaM and Ministry of Gender, with all other stakeholders, will work very hard to map out mechanisms to assist these young girls. These girls should be in class advancing their education for better futures so that they can contribute to the economic growth of this country. The girls of today can be our women leaders of tomorrow and that of the future.

Reading these true stories, it is difficult to withhold tears, tears of fear and pain, tears of not being there, at the right time and moment, to help those that are in all these dilemmas.

As you read these stories, remember that these girls are our daughters, nieces, granddaughters and neighbours. They deserve our care and support.

A word from GEMSANaM

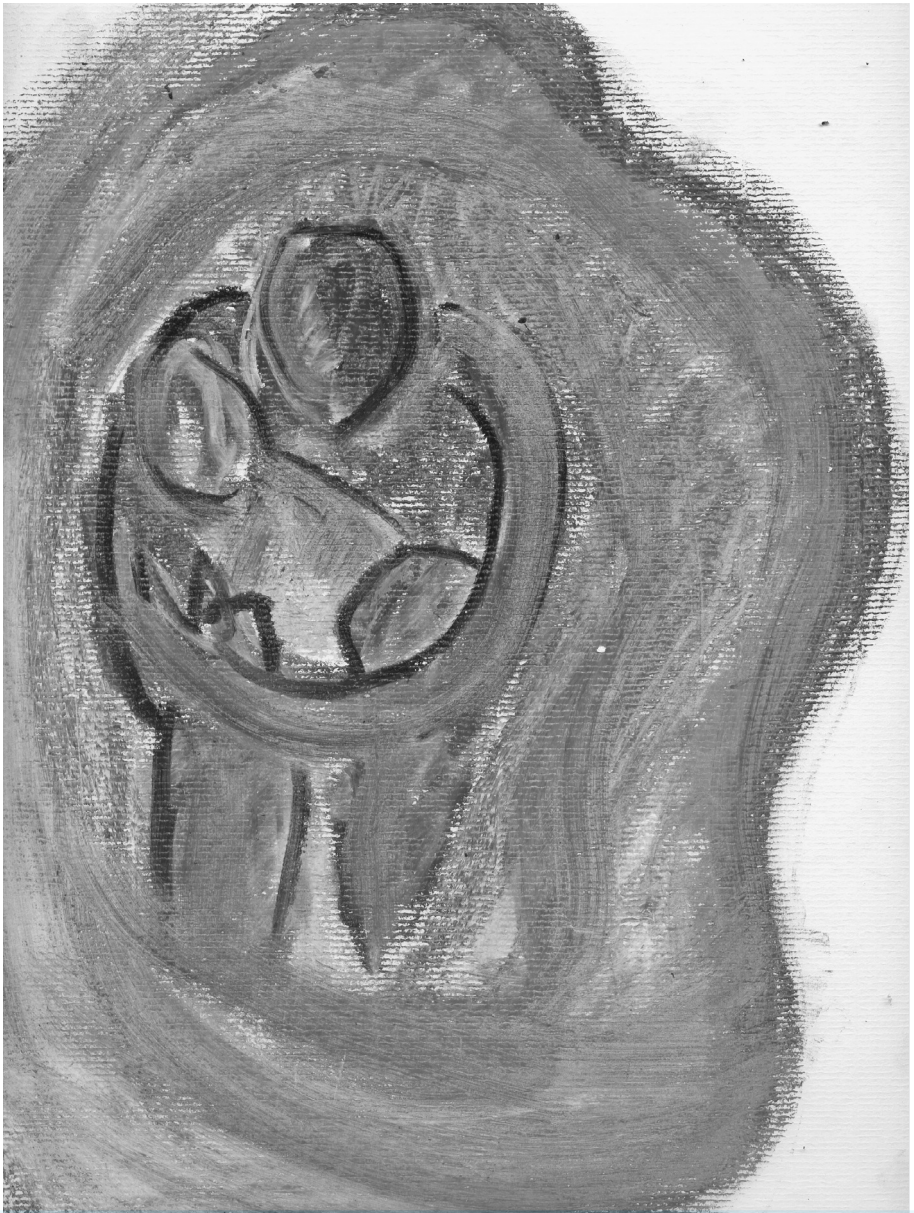
by Sarry Xoagus-Eises

This is the second year that the Namibian *"I" Stories* will be reaching the streets of Namibia and other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. For 2008, GEMSANaM and its partners chose to highlight the negative impact gender based violence has on young girls. Violence in various forms affects the progress of young girls, especially since it is often family members and others close to them responsible for the abuse. Giving girls the space they need to come out of the box is a campaign strategy to open up space for young women, and break barriers around violence against girls in the country.

The right of girls to education is one of the most critical of all rights. Education plays an important role in enabling girls to secure other rights. Yet this right is systematically violated all over the world despite many international and national instruments and commitments designed to safeguard girls access to education. Namibia is not an exception. Each year thousands of girls drop out of formal education structures, because of pregnancies, poverty, care work on HIV and AIDS, and so many other reasons.

We hope these stories will help heal the pain girls have undergone, the frustration and hurt of selling their bodies to feed families. These girls are asking the Namibian government to protect all children, as Namibia is a signatory to the International Convention of the Rights of the Child. And that needs to be seen and done urgently.

Gender violence and HIV



The hateful, unhappy life is over

by Monday*

I am 23, a single mother of two sons. In 2004, during my first pregnancy, I tested and found out I am now living with HIV. Luckily, my sons were protected from getting the virus at an early stage.

It was my uncle's baby and when I told him that the baby was his, he refused to accept this. He took out a panga, saying if it were really his baby, he would take it out. I cried as hard as I could, but it did not help. He kicked me on the floor, sat on top of me, and lifted up his right hand, with which he was holding the panga.

I cried and begged him. I told him that I would never tell anyone, and that it was our secret. He felt pity for me and stood up off me. By the time I gave birth, my uncle was very ill. He died of AIDS.

I went to live with my stepfather and mother. My mother was working on a farm. One night I saw my stepfather in my room and I asked him what he was doing. He slapped me and said it was his house and he could do anything he liked. He then jumped on me and raped me.

I picked up my baby and cried, saying Lord why me? First, it was my uncle, now him. My Lord - what have I done to be punished like this? The next night he raped me again. I told him I would tell my mother what he was doing to me. He warned me that he was capable of killing my baby and me.

By that time, I was not thinking straight. When I saw my mother step in the door, I started crying, telling her what her husband was doing to me, but she accused me of everything that happened. She would not believe me. She threw me out of her house. I slept with my baby in the outside toilet for three months.

Her husband begged her to let me stay in the house. She agreed and I moved back in the house. She went back to the farm again to work. My stepfather started again with the same things, he carried on raping me. That is how I got pregnant with the second child. I gave birth to the second boy. When my boy was six months, my stepfather died and my mother died too.

Thanks to the Lord, my boys are very healthy. I am also taking my anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs and living a positive life. I thank the Lord that I am over that life, that hateful, unhappy life, the dark nights. Thanks to the Lord that he gave me my life back and I can smile.

Raped and abandoned

by Mona*

I grew up in Lüderitz. When I was five years old, my father took me to Owamboland (Northern Namibia) to stay with my stepmother. I started my school there. There was an old bus outside the house where the neighbour's sons always raped me. I did not say anything because I was afraid. They threatened me, and they said they would kill me.

I started to steal because I was not getting support from my stepmother. My stepmother always reported me to my father. He started beating me a lot, and my stepmother did not like me anymore. When I was eight, I went back to my mother with my little cousin. I told her not to send me to the north anymore.

I was very good in school but because of money problems, I did not continue. My first boyfriend threatened me a lot. I was afraid of sex, because of the experience I had of rape when I was growing up. While I was in high school, I would have boyfriends every now and then. We had sex by the soccer field, or wherever we went in Windhoek.

My mother started drinking a lot and I was sleeping with her boyfriend. I eventually became a sex worker and started sleeping with men without a condom, just for money. I now live with HIV and I do not want to tell anyone, because I am afraid they may chase me out of the house.

Raped, pregnant and HIV positive

by Izan Namases*

I am 17 years old and I am a person who is living with HIV. I am now six months pregnant. The boy who impregnated me is still schooling and is in Grade 9. I do not know where I got the HIV virus. I have kept it a secret for a long time.

One day, I was walking in front of Jan Jonker Afrikaner School and I was drunk. A man walked towards me and raped me. That man did not use a condom and I immediately developed many sores all over my vagina. I did not go to school for a long time and lost my place in school.

My parents were alcoholic and now they are dead. I am the only one who must look after my sisters and brothers. I have three sisters who are older than I am and I have four brothers who are younger than I am. One brother of mine is in jail and I am the only one who must take care of our youngest brother now, because we have no one to take care of us. The reason my brother is in jail is because he was caught selling drugs. He always drinks and smokes dagga.

My youngest brother has tuberculosis. I cannot love and care for all of them because I am weak. I am sick. I am always crying and praying to God for somebody who will look after me. I need help for the baby that I am carrying. I do not have a mother or father. I lost them and do not want to lose the ones that I love.

My elder sisters do not care about my brothers or me. I am the only one who cares about them. I need help from anybody who can understand my feelings. I don't want to tell everybody that I am sick. If I would have listened to my mother's words, I would not have gotten sick. All I need is help and support from people. If I get that support, I will be blessed that is all I need.

Gender Violence and sex work



I am carrying a heavy cross, living on the streets

by Sara*

When I was six years old, I was schooling at Aris School. My mother and father resigned from working at the farm in 1997. We moved to Windhoek and I went to stay with someone while my parents went to work at sea.

I often went to school with an empty stomach and kids teased me. I finished my Grade 7 when I was 19 years of age and I had my first baby then. I moved to Gobabis to go and live with my baby's father. He worked at a farm but did not buy anything for the baby or me. I had to struggle on my own. Then I decided that it did not help to stay with him and moved back to Windhoek.

A friend of mine that I met was a sex worker, she took me to Father Herman, and he helps me until now. I am looking for a job but I cannot find any. I have three children now. The second one's father just dropped me without reason. Then I decided to become a sex worker and go to the streets to look for my children's food.

I was living a very difficult life. My clients gave me N$200.00 (R200.00) for one round doing it without a condom. In a week, I would go for two days, Fridays and Saturdays, and that is how I got my third child.

My child does not have a father and all my kids are growing up without their fathers. I got tired of the life of being a sex worker and I am trying to build my life. The caretaker spoke with me and I listened. I am still suffering because the caretaker doesn't give us enough food. If I can't find more food, I will go back to the streets.

Nowadays I do not go to the bridge to look for men. I sleep with older men so that I can get money to support my children. They pay more. I am homeless and stay with men just for a sleeping place.

My child must start school next year and I do not have money to send her to school. She and the second born are staying with my mother at the farm and the last born is living with me. I leave my child with people while I go out for sex work for three to four days. I wish I could get a solution and get a normal life to go on with my life.

I suffered a lot

by Anna*

About six years ago, I went to school at Mariental. No one looked after me. After school, my friends and I would go to town to look for food in the dustbins, after which we went home in the afternoons. My stepfather, who was not working, used to send me to bed when I came home from school. When I went to bed, he would follow me. My mom was at work at the time. My stepfather started raping me then. This happened for quite some time.

One day my mum came home from work and found me crying. She asked me why I was crying. I told her that my stepfather had sex with me without a condom. I was 14 years at that time. My mother took me to a clinic and the doctor said I was pregnant. My mom chased me out of the house.

I reported the case to the police and they arrested my stepfather. I gave birth to a baby boy. My stepfather's family brought me some clothes for baby, but my mother said that I was sick and she didn't want me in her house. My stepfather took the child and I went back to my mom, but she chased me away.

I went to stay with my friends. They told me to go to the bridge with them to sell our bodies. I made N$100.00 per day with a condom. I bought shoes and clothes every time I got the N$100.00 and gave an old woman N$10.00 just to wash myself. My sister told me to go to the caretaker to tell him that I am a sex worker. He gave me five minutes to get a cab to Otjomuise because our clients were sugar daddies, he said.

We usually are a group of five girls that work together. To those who are reading this, please help others

Treated like a slave, raped

By Kitty*

I am Kitty, 25 years old, I was born at Dordabis on a farm close to Gobabis. I grew up with my mother and father. My parents were not married but they were living together. My mother was working at Dordabis farm as a domestic worker, while my father cleaned the yards at the same farm.

The employers did not treat my parents well. Even if they worked harder, they only received food, no payment. I grew up just looking after our house at the farm. I did not go to school.

We lived well with my parents, despite the economic hardships. In 2002, my brother who lives and is a teacher in Okahandja came to visit us at the farm. He heard about the ill treatment of my parents by the employers.

When I was 18, my parents decided that my brother should take me to Okahandja. I went to Okahandja and started taking care of my brother's two daughters. My brother was not married, but the two children were from the same mother, who lived apart from him.

After a while, my brother started treating me like a slave. I worked hard, washed clothes, cleaned the house, cooked and did all kinds of other work without pay. All that was bought for me was food, Vaseline and wash soap.

My brother treated his children like queens. For them, he bought clothes and expensive cosmetics and anything they wanted. He was really discriminating against me. It was on a Wednesday the same year, I remember, when he pretended to have gone to work while the children went to school. He came back home. I was alone.

He told me that he wanted to talk to me while the kids were away. He told me he liked my body. I laughed at first because I thought he was joking. But I realised that he was serious. I asked him how he could like my body, I was his sister.

He said he was jealous that other men would like my body. He started touching my breasts and private parts. I was worried and continued to ask him what he was doing. He said I must not worry because he was going to pay me. He said if I told the story, he would kill my parents and me. He took my clothes off, threw me on the bed, and raped me. After he raped me, he gave me N$200.

On the following day, he went to work. My neighbour, who was also my friend, was travelling to Windhoek on that day. I decided to go with her. I just left the key next door and left for Windhoek.

It was the first time I came to Windhoek. I stayed with her and realised that she was a sex worker. She told me that this is Windhoek and life is very expensive. The only way is to sell your body to make money.

She taught me how to behave like a sex worker, how to walk and dress like a sex worker. She gave me clothes like miniskirts, tight tops that showed my breast. I was ashamed, but she encouraged me to be strong and look attractive so that clients would run for me.

After she trained me, we went to town, to stand at the place where we would get men. At first, I was ashamed, as I was not used to such behaviour. The same night she took me to a club and made me drink so that I could get drunk and not feel ashamed.

After my friend saw I was a bit drunk, she told me to go back to the place where sex workers wait for their clients. When we arrived, other sex workers were jealous to see me, saying that this new girl wants to take our men. I was afraid of the girls but my friend started fighting for me, saying I will lose clients if I continued to be afraid.

The first day we didn't get any man because I was confused and did not know what was happening. When we arrived home my friend yelled at me saying that this is Windhoek, the only way to survive is through selling your body.

The second day we went, I did what she told me and a white Boer came driving a pickup bakkie. He chose me and asked me to turn around, so that he could see if I had the body he wanted. He told me to get into his car and he drove to the bush. On the way, he was negotiating for the price that he would pay. He said he would pay me N$200 for one round and two rounds N$400. He took me to the bush, we had one round with a condom, and he paid me N$200.

When we finished everything and he was driving me back, I asked him if he did not have work for me. I told him my story and he decided to give me a job as a domestic worker at his house. He dropped me at the Royal Hotel and told me to be back the next day in the morning, so that he could collect me to go work at his house.

The next morning I went to the Royal Hotel in the morning and the Boer came to collect me and took me to his house. At his house, I found his wife, his child and grandmother in a wheelchair.

The wife was happy to see me because they were looking for a domestic worker for a long time. I was puzzled and asked myself what if he continued sleeping with me and the wife found out. Luckily, the Boer man did not continue sleeping with me.

They were paying me an amount of N$500. I worked for them for a year. In the same year, I visited my parents and took some money and food to them. They asked why I left

my brother but I just told them we could not understand each other. I left without telling them the truth.

While working in Windhoek, I met my brother in a bar and he did not talk to me. I felt bad. Until today, we are the greatest of enemies. I want to forgive my brother, but I am still struggling to come to terms with what he did to me.

After a year, I left my job because my employers did not continue to pay me as promised. My dream is to become a nurse now. I am unemployed. I want to change my life to keep away from the streets. I now visit father Herman every Wednesday to get food. I want to advise people reading my story to take care of their bodies and that whenever they face poverty they must not become prostitutes. Sex work should be the last resort - it does not pay and you will only get diseases.

No home for an innocent child

by Maria*

I am 21 years old. At the age of seven years, I went to school in Mariental. I started my Grade 1 about the time when my mother got work in Windhoek. I lived with my grandmother in Mariental. In 2002, my father died. My grandmother died two years later and I had to move to Windhoek to stay with my mother in 2004.

My mother used to drink too much and she did not want to buy me basic needs. She also did not pay my school fees. I had to drop out of school.

One night, I was sleeping when my uncle broke into our house and raped me while my mother was drinking homemade brew at a neighbour's house. The next day I was crying and told my mother what happened, but she said I was lying and that her brother would never do something like that. I told her to go and ask him, but my uncle said I was lying. When my mother returned, she beat me very much.

I ran away from home and went to live with my friends in Babylon (Okuryangava). My friends told me to go to town and beg for money and food. My friends also told me to go to the bridge and sell our bodies for money. We used to get N$20 dollar or N$5 for sex. Sometimes the client will sleep with me without paying anything. After a few months, when I was 18, I fell pregnant with my first child.

My aunt came and told me that I will have a child and must no longer go to the bridge. She took me to a caretaker so that I could get food for my child. When I came back to my friend's house, she threw me out of her house and accused me of having money which I did not have and that I did not buy food for the house.

Now I don't have a house to live in. The only option I have is to go back and stay at the bridge for the whole night, with my poor baby whose father I do not even know. I went to a caretaker and told him my story. He brought me zincs to build a house for myself in Windhoek. After a few months, my mother came to my house and accused me of being HIV positive, saying that my child was also sick, but I was not. She said I slept around with older men. At the time she was saying all this, I had already stopped going to the bridge.

She forced me out of my own house and brought in her lover and they lived there. Then I begged my friend to take me back at her house and she said yes. I moved there with my baby, to my friend's house. A woman said to me I have a small baby and I should not move around too much. She asked me to go and live with her and so I did.

However, she did not want to give me food so I had to ask at the neighbours. I tried my best to look for work but I didn't get any and she still denied me food. I always begged from others to get something to eat. I still want to go back and complete my school but I don't have money to pay for my school fees. My mother passed away in 2006.

I don't want to sleep around with men anymore. All I want to say is to advise all the young girls out there not to run away from home like I did and not to sell their bodies for money. Finish your studies and become someone important in life and don't suffer like I did.

Betrayed by family



When the community turns its back on you

by Rose Van Wyk*

People normally say family members are there to take care of each other, but one never knows what goes on in other people's minds or hearts. When I was nine years old, as children we would go out and play at night.

We would play until it was very late, without our parents caring or worrying where we were. One night as we went to play as usual, a group of guys came by. All the kids ran away because everyone knew they were gangsters.

I was the unlucky one to be caught. They took me to an old building and all six boys raped me. Every one of them took turns. I tried to escape but it was not possible. When they finished, they told me not to say a word to anyone.

The next day my sister and people who stayed with me at the house didn't say a word to my parents, but they knew what had happened. Everyone found out at school that I was gang raped, but it seemed a joke to everyone. It took about a year for everyone to forget what happened, but to me it was just the beginning of more nightmares.

That same year when everyone forgot the town's talk, we moved to a new location. I was glad I was going to start over again. Then the nightmare began. One of my younger uncles, who I thought was one of the best friends I could count on, had come from the village to town to collect his identification card. He arrived in the afternoon and was

leaving the next morning, in the early hours.

After we finished eating dinner that night, we all went to sleep. I was sharing a room with my sister and my aunt, and the boys were sleeping in the living room with my uncle. During the early hours of the next day, he sneaked into my bed. I don't know how he got into our room. At first, I thought I was having a bad dream. He then put his hand on my mouth so that I would not scream or make a sound. He raped me and left the household without saying anything to anyone.

I said nothing the next day because I knew how my parents would react. They were always cold and would never have believed or understood what I went through. On the other hand, my father was very abusive to my mother in the house and communication was not available to us. My father would beat my mother, leaving her with marks all over her body.

It was 1996 when my mother decided enough was enough and left us with this abusive man. She went to stay with her family and we were never allowed to see or talk to her. My father kept dreaming that my mother would still come back to him.

As time passed, he began to be more abusive to me. He started beating and punishing me because he could not do it to my brother, because at the time he was six years old. He would beat me for no reason and he called me names and said I was a bitch just like my mother.

He was transferred to Otjiwarongo where he met another woman. We stayed there without knowing where our mother was, but then he started the abusiveness again. He would lock me up in the fridge for 10 minutes, which was sometimes very cold. I could say I started getting used to it. He now stays in Otjiwarongo with his wife and kids he got from that woman. I sometimes talk to him but the words he said to me and the things he did to me I can never forget, or forgive him.

A word of advice to the youth is that silence does not pay. You will just end up hating each day you live. So speak up to anyone you trust. I just wish I don't end up like my father to my kids someday. When I beat my child, it just ends up making me cry. I just have that hate and pain which I don't think I can handle. It's just too much pain.

How bitter my pain was!

by Sharleen*

I am 18 years old living in Windhoek, Katutura. My father passed away when I was two years old. This is a real story of the pain my stepfather caused me.

My mother got married in 1998 when I was eight years old. The man she married drank and smoked, and in 1999, he left his job. He used to go out in the morning and come back at night... wake us all up, start beating us, including my mother and my two sisters, and lock us out of the house. If we cried, he used to chase me and my two sisters out and lock the house. We would sleep outside until the next morning. He also brought food in the house but would not allow us to eat. He only allowed my mother to eat. He used to say that we should go and look for our father.

If my mother gave us food, he would take the food from us and give it to the dogs. My mother's sister helped us with food. We would eat at her place and go back home. Sometimes, she had nothing and we used to sleep with hunger. I used to cry every night because he beat us every day. When I came home from school, while my mother was still at work, he used to tell me and my sister to go to my aunt's house, but he never allowed me to go.

He used to show me his private parts and tell me to taste, because he said it tasted like chocolate but I used to refuse and he beat me with a belt. If my mother came home and asked why I was crying, he used to say to her, "your daughter doesn't want to wash dishes. She refuses if I tell her to do something, but you want me to give them food?" He never stopped doing what he was doing.

In March 2000, my mother was admitted to the hospital because she had a problem with her pregnancy. While she was in the hospital, at night my stepfather used to pull off my underwear and enter my female parts with his finger. When I cried, he would

cover my mouth with one hand. Sometimes I would ask one old lady who lived next door to lock us in from outside and give the keys to my stepfather and tell him we went to my aunt's house. We would then take our blankets and sleep under the bed so that he could not get us.

After some time, my mother came home from hospital. However, he never stopped mistreating us and he told me that if I told anyone, he would kill me. Once I went for a weekend to my aunt's house. The kids were playing different games but I was not playing with them. I was just quiet on my own and my aunt asked me if there was something was wrong. I pretended nothing was wrong.

The next day, which was a Saturday, she called me while I was sitting under a tree. She said she could see something was wrong and I should just tell her. So, I decided to tell her. I told her that my stepfather used to beat us every night. I also told her that I felt pain when I visited the toilet. I also told her everything that he did to me. My aunt took me to the clinic and they checked and treated me because I had sores on my private parts. They referred us to the Woman and Child Protection Centre to go and lay charges against my stepfather. When we reached home, my aunt told my mother but my mother would not believe what we said. They also called my two sisters in and my aunt asked that we should go and live with her for the time being. So we moved.

One morning my mother came to my aunt's house and she said she did not believe what my aunt and I were talking about, but she was shocked to hear that her husband was talking about sex to her neighbour's daughter. She was told that if she did not tell her husband to stop, the neighbour would report her to the police. She wanted my aunt to help her get a divorce. We all went to the Woman and Child Protection Unit and there she told me she wanted a divorce. They referred her to Legal Aid where she got help and her husband was arrested. The people at Legal Aid told us we must move back to our mother's house.

The bad times have passed but memories still come back. Please stand up for your rights!

I seek justice

by Mansie*

I am a 20-year old girl. My name is Mansie and I want justice in my life. I suffered through hard times with emotional, physical and sexual abuse by my father, and yet I am their only child.

It started when I was nine years old. My father always wanted to wash me each time I took a bath. He would tell me that he was just putting too much soap on the washing cloth. I would tell him that it was getting sore, and he would say that it is almost finished. He said it was a secret between us and I must not tell anyone, not even my mother, or he would kill her.

Every night he would come into my room while my mom was asleep and put his hand on my mouth and rape me. After he was done, he would say that I have a nice vagina and nobody must have his place.

At school, when my friends talked about how wonderful their fathers were, I cried and prayed to God that something must happen to my father. I wanted to tell my auntie who is close to us, but I was afraid maybe he would kill her too.

I wanted to do or say something when he attacked me, but I was too afraid. One day, on a Sunday, while he was sleeping I took out a knife. I wanted to stab him but something in my heart said, "He who kills suffers the most."

At school, my grades went down. I was the slowest person in school. When I tried to listen to teachers in school, nothing seemed to happen in my head. I was thinking about what had happened to me at home. I was also scared of going to school. My mother also told

my father that I was stupid and must leave school because I wasting their money. If I was busy in the kitchen, my father would come and touch my bums and breasts and tell me that that night he would come.

When I turned 17 years old, I decided to run away from home. I wrote a letter to my mother telling her what happened. I did not know where to stay but I just slept wherever I thought was safe. After two weeks, I noticed that I was pregnant. I wanted to kill myself. An old woman called Francis noticed me, came, gave me some bread and milk, and asked me what I was doing. I was scared to tell her but she assisted me and was good to me, so I told her everything. She provided me with shelter and food.

When my mother heard about the story, she did not look for me. She just sent a message that she loved her husband and did not believe me but I must not tell anyone about it, it was between us. I gave birth to a baby boy but I hated him a lot because he reminded me of the bad times that happened to me. But my new mother Francis encouraged me to love my little boy.

My advice to other young girls is that if you have anything that hurts inside your heart, please speak out, don't keep it - otherwise you will get used to it and think it is normal.

Gender Violence is all around



Taking charge of my life amidst rape and violence

by Helvis Sibingo *

I really do not understand why men always take advantage of young girls, even their children. My name is Helvis. I was abused at a very tender age. I remember when I was very young we stayed in an informal settlement. My parents were unemployed and one day they went out and they left a stranger to look after me.

Soon after they left, the man took advantage of me. He tied a cloth on my mouth so that I would not shout and he was about to rape me in our shack. When my parents returned, he warned me that I should not say any word to my parents or he would kill me, and I kept quite till today. I don't even know if the man is still alive.

When I was five years old, my mother took me to stay with my grandmother at the village. I stayed with my grandmother for many years and there was no problem until my uncle, aunt and grandfather passed away in one year. It was a shock to me but I tried to take the pain away.

When my grandmother's cattle herdsmen saw that there were no elderly people in my family except my old grandmother, they took advantage of everyone and everything.

One day my grandmother went for an eye check up for three days. The cattle herdsmen were very excited and at night they would come to our room and rape us (my cousin and I). When we woke up in the morning, we would find ourselves naked. We felt pain when we walked around the house and we had bruises.

This happened several times until we decided to set a trap for them. One night we waited to see who would be coming to our room. We pretended we were asleep. They removed our clothes and our underwear, but when they wanted to rape us again, we all shouted and they ran away. The next day, I confronted them and asked them why they were doing these things to us, but they did not answer me. They only started beating me up and I ran away.

When I was seven years old, there was a new cattle herdsman. He was 43 years old. After he had stayed with us for some months, he started showing his "true colours." Each time, my grandmother travelled and he saw that we did not have food, he would call me to come take porridge. When I reached his place, he would lock me in his house, shut my mouth and rape me. When I cried he would tell me not to cry, that he would finish now, and do it fast. The first day he raped me, I had serious tissue damage.

He would buy me sweets after raping me. I continued staying with my grandmother, until 2005 when my mother came to fetch me to go and live with her in Windhoek. I was very happy to leave that miserable life I was living.

However, as if that was not enough, there were more surprises still to come. In Windhoek, I lived with my mother and my 64-year old stepfather. In August 2006, my stepfather raped me. It was when my mother travelled to Katima Mulilo on a three-month business trip. I was left with my stepfather and at night he forced me to sleep with him in his bed. He raped me at the age of 14 years. I started crying because it was painful.

Since my childhood, I am just being raped. I remember everything that happened to me and I keep on crying. My stepfather raped me four times. When I wanted to tell my mother, my stepfather said I would just cause problems because my mother was not working and we would suffer.

My biggest fear was that my mother might travel to Katima Mulilo again to do some business and she would take another three months and I would be alone with my

stepfather. That scared me because I was afraid that he would rape me again. It was painful and he did not use a condom. I wanted to tell my mother but I was too afraid of the unknown. I was afraid that my mother might chase me out of the house. I have kept silent until now. It is still my secret and it hurts me.

I just want mothers to take care of their children so that they don't go through the same situation I went through. Take charge of your life while you can, and that will give you the courage to take action.

Living with a painful memory

by Beckham*

I'm staying in Katutura. It was August and I was on holiday in Windhoek from the north to visit my mother and father. There was a man who was between 32 and 35 years old who was always trying to get sexual intercourse with me by force. The man bought me sweets, biscuits, apples and other stuff. I was six years old. One morning my parents went into town leaving me with that man, whom I later learned was a servant who used to clean the yard and water the gardens.

He came into the house and found me sitting on my mother's bed. He started asking me many questions, and in a second, he pulled me and threw me on top of the bed. He tried to remove my clothes and said I must just be quiet because he will hit me. He took off my clothes and he raped me. It was painful as he was pushing his penis in me without a condom.

I didn't bleed but when I walked my bones were painful for days and days. He even said if I tell anyone of the housemates he would beat me, so I just kept my mouth shut. I could not tell my mom because I thought she would beat me.

This continued several times. I told him one day that he must stop abusing me because it's hurting a lot. He just said he did not care. He said he was doing what he was doing because he gave me nice stuff like sweets and biscuits.

My advice is just to say young girls should stay away from servants because they could be unfaithful people and don't take their sweets and nice things. I live with that painful memory.

Gender violence and peer pressure

by Baby white*

When I was 14 years old, I went with my friend Dian to attend evening studies. Before the study my friend told me she had a surprise for me. I was excited about the surprise, was in a hurry, and did not even wait for the evening class to finish. After the study, my friend asked me to accompany her to their house. When we arrived at her house, she asked me again if I minded to get inside their house. I said its ok. It was late but I was waiting for the surprise.

We went to her room and she pulled the bed cover. However, that was another story it was not about the surprise she told me. I was still puzzled what she wanted to do with me. I decided to go home. She asked me why I was in a hurry. I said my grandmother is going to come down hard on me if I go home late.

She kept on saying I must wait. I just got angry and when I tried to leave her house, her brother came in and started pushing me. He said I was going nowhere. He took me to their room where he tried to rape me. I was too small. He tried many ways to destroy me, but he did not succeed. I was crying. After he saw that it was tough to do what he wanted, he kicked me out of their house. I went home crying but no one asked me what happened. I decided to keep it a secret.

The next day when I went to school my friend was already spreading rumours that I had slept with her brother and my schoolmates were teasing me. I was crying every day, I wanted to tell the truth but I thought people would not believe me. I decided just to

leave school and stay at home. I stayed at home two weeks but I realised that it was too risky not to go to school. I cannot abandon my education like that. At the time, I was in Grade 7.

I went to school in the third week to see what the learners were going to say. When I got to school, I told my teacher that I was pregnant while it was not true. The teacher probed me further and I had to tell him the whole story, the way it happened. What goes around comes around. My friend got pregnant. Now she has a child and is a good mother.

Lucky me, I did not get pregnant or get a sexually transmitted disease. My friend asked me for forgiveness. I promised to forgive her but I won't forget the pain she caused me that day. Until now, my grandmother died without knowing what happened to me. I blame myself for going with my friend to her house that day. We were good friends who shared secrets but she hid a lot from me.

Where is the law when you need it?

by Breda Spring*

I was born in Windhoek 16 years ago, in the Katutura Hospital. I am the second child from my mother's side. I don't know who gave me my real name. I am telling the story according to what my grandmother told me. My grandmother said I was born a very sick child. I was born with tuberculosis. My parents were both alcoholics but didn't live together.

When I was 10 months old, my mother left me with my father. I lived with my father under the care of my great grandmother. At the age of two, my father took me to Swakopmund to his mother, my grandmother.

From five years old, I started my own struggle, to earn money. I started looking for bottles in dustbins to sell at the bottle store. I sold bottles to survive, to buy bread, sugar and sweets. If I didn't sell any bottles, I would go to the beach and look in the dustbins for food or bottles to sell. I did this until I was 11 years.

I started school at the age of six and passed Grades 1, 2 and 3. Then came an aunt of mine from Windhoek. When I was 11 years, she asked my grandfather if I could go back with her to Windhoek. I went to stay with her in Windhoek at her house. For a year, I did not attend regular school but went to an afternoon school.

I grew up fighting for myself and I used to have money in Swakopmund. The situation changed in Windhoek because I could not continue selling bottles. I didn't know Windhoek that well, and so I started stealing. My aunt was selling chocolate and she taught me how to sell chocolate. If I was short of money she would beat me. When I

started schooling, there was a day that my aunt was baking and I took a N$200.00 note from under the mat. I didn't know it was a N$200.00, I thought it was a N$20.00 note.

I ran to the shop and took chips. When I came to the till, I realised it was big money and that my aunt will beat me. I left the chips, took the money back home, and put it under the mat, and then I went to school. My aunt was also selling meat for another man. One day she collected the money for the meat and she forgot the N$200.00 under the mat. I reminded her about the N$200.00 under the mat and she said there was N$400.00 and not N$200.00 and beat me up for that. She accused me of stealing. She closed her house and called the police to question me.

I ran to my grandmother's house. While I was there, a woman came in and my grandmother told me to greet the woman, saying she was my mother. At the age of 12, I met my mother for the first time. She did not say anything. I found it difficult to accept that she was my mother because she never bothered to look for me. I stayed at my grandmother's house for a month and then went back to my auntie's house.

In the location where I was staying, opposite our house I used to visit my friends whom we went to school together. One day I went to bath at their house. My friends finished bathing and I was slow. While I was still in the shower a man who was renting at my friend's place came into the bath and told me it was just the two of us. I ran out of the bathroom naked and nothing happened on that day.

On a Saturday, when I was coming from the swimming pool on my way home, I met the same man. He told me to go with him and buy some cigarettes. After buying the cigarettes, he said we must quickly collect something in the bush across from our houses. When we got to the bush, he threw me on the ground, pulled my trousers off, and raped me. I was a virgin at the time and was in pain. He gave me N$10.

When I arrived home my body and head were covered with sand. There was a woman at our house and she asked me what was going on. I told her the truth. She told my

auntie and she took me to the Woman and Child Protection Centre. The doctor examined me and found out that my virginity was broken. We went to the police station and made a case. The man was arrested and then was out on bail. That happened in 2003.

Since then I don't know what happened to the man who raped me and I don't even know what happened to the case. I moved to my grandmother's house so that I cannot meet the man who raped me again. My grandmother died in 2007. The family came, took the house, and threw me on the streets. I now stay in the zinc-house in Katter location with my cousin.

I am afraid that I might be raped again because the place is not conducive to staying there. My neighbour friends help me with food. My dream was always to become a policewoman and now that dream is gone. I would like to advise whoever is reading my story to see how difficult life can be if you do not grow up with your parents or are looked after by people that do not love you. All I want to say is for children to take their school seriously and study hard no matter what.

New beginnings



Speaking out to heal

by Laidyheart*

I cry in my sleep - I wake up, I am still crying! My name is Laidyheart. I am 20 years old. I grew up with my parents and my two brothers. When I was between the ages of 6 and 12 years, I saw my father beat my mother almost everyday. I recalled that each time my father wanted to beat my mother he would start beating me. When my mother asked why he was beating me, he would beat her up.

In 1998, my mother was admitted to a hospital for an operation but that had nothing to do with the fact that my father beat her. It was natural. Since my father was always at home after quitting his job, we stayed with him at home. Since my mother was not there, I had to cook. One day my father found me in the kitchen cooking and he beat me up for nothing. I started fearing him and whenever he was at home, I would be outside of the house. One day he sent me to fetch water, I found my schoolmates there and we started playing. When I went home, I found him very furious and angry, he started beating me and then he pulled me into my room and made me lie down on my bed. He started asking me if those children I was playing with had touched me. I said yes because I did not know what he meant by "touching." He told me that he was also going to touch me. I was shivering and terrified to death. He took out his private part and told me to lick it. He told me to stop crying and to do what he was saying. He warned me not to tell anyone because he was going to kill me if I said something.

When my mother came out of the hospital, I was always crying at school. The teacher would ask me what was wrong, but I was quiet. I always claimed I had a headache and I could not study. I couldn't do my homework. I left school when I was 13-years old. I decided to run away from home and stay with my grandmother. My mother was worried that I would drop out of school. She came to take me back home but I told her that it was better for me to die. My mother started to cry and asked me what was wrong, but I ran away. One day my father came to visit my grandmother but I knew the reason was just to warn me that if I told anyone he would kill me. In 2003, I decided to tell my mother, but my

father denied it and said I was lying and that I made up the story. However, my mother and family blamed him, but they did not report it to the police. He chased me away from the house. My mother also filed for a divorce but then our church pastor advised them to forgive each other and for me to forgive my father and stay with my grandmother. Although it was hard, I was at least feeling better because I spoke out what was killing me inside.

In 2004, my auntie invited me to come for a holiday at her house in Windhoek and in order for me to feel better with my life, I started my Grade 9 in one of the schools. However, the drama started when my aunt's sister told my aunt that I had a boyfriend and accused me of sleeping with big people. My aunt believed her and decided that she was not going to pay for my school fees. I cried and decided to go back to my mother. When I returned home, things were just the same with my father.

In 2007, one of my cousins called me to come and look after her baby. One day I found out that there was registration going on at one of the schools nearby our house. I went there and I got accepted in Grade 11. I did not have enough money to pay. Although my cousin was working in a factory, the money she earned was not enough to pay for my school fees and books. I started going to school anyway and I was happy because I met a good friend, although I was afraid to share with people my life story over the past years. In August 2007, my cousin travelled to the north and one of my cousin's brothers took advantage and raped me. He came into the house, sat by my bed, and started a conversation because we were only three in the house including his small sister who had come for holidays.

I couldn't scream. The next day he spent his day out. I did not report the matter to the police or tell someone. I started crying and decided to commit suicide by taking tablets and this affected my studies and school. I decided not to go to school. Although some of my teachers recognised that I had a problem and asked, I couldn't tell them at first.

Later on, I realised that I had to speak to someone to get help. My teacher referred me to a social worker, that is where I got help, and I feel better now. Please women of Africa, let's speak up against violence. I thought my dreams of a better life were over but they are not. Now is the time to speak out while it's not too late. You and I can help each other if we speak out.

Beaten and exploited

by Blom *

In 1995 when I came from the farm with my parents, I was still at school and I was in Grade 4. My father lost his job and I could not continue going to school because there was no money to pay for school fees or to buy food. My mother was also not employed.

I am the first born of my parents. I have three sisters and two brothers. We used to walk around and beg on the streets for money. Life became so hard for us. I met a friend who was always on the streets. I also started walking around with them on the streets so that I could at least get something to buy food for my family. It was not easy because we were beaten up on the streets and sometimes we were not given money.

I continued going to the streets until my father became sick. I also fell pregnant on the streets when I was 18 years. It was difficult for me because my mother's family started talking bad about me. I then decided to drink my father's mental pills because I was always crying. My mother came in the room where I was sitting and crying and talked with me and said I must not concentrate on what people were saying because God is there and it will not go as they think. There are also many people who are suffering, it's only not me.

So, I must look to God and pray, that's what she told me. I decided not to drink the tablets because I believed in what my mother told me. My child is four years old but I still suffer with my child because there is no father. I still get some food at one place but it is still difficult for me. And the thing I am telling God is that I did not kill my child.

So all I can tell the young girls is, even if it's difficult, you must just look at God because he also heard my prayer and he will look after you!

Starting on the other side of the river

by Maria*

I was born in Dordabis and I am 22-years-old. I grew up with my father and stepmother. I never grew up with my mother or even saw her at all. My stepmother did not want to stay with me; she did not like me at all. She did not give me any motherly love; she showed me that I was not her child. She did not have a child at first, but later had a son.

I suffered her abuse in silence and never told my father. At the age of 12, I had never attended school. My father's brother came to visit us and asked my father if I could go and stay with him in Windhoek. I left for Windhoek with my uncle and started school there. At my uncle's house, there was a brother of my uncle's wife. That man took advantage of me and started sleeping with me.

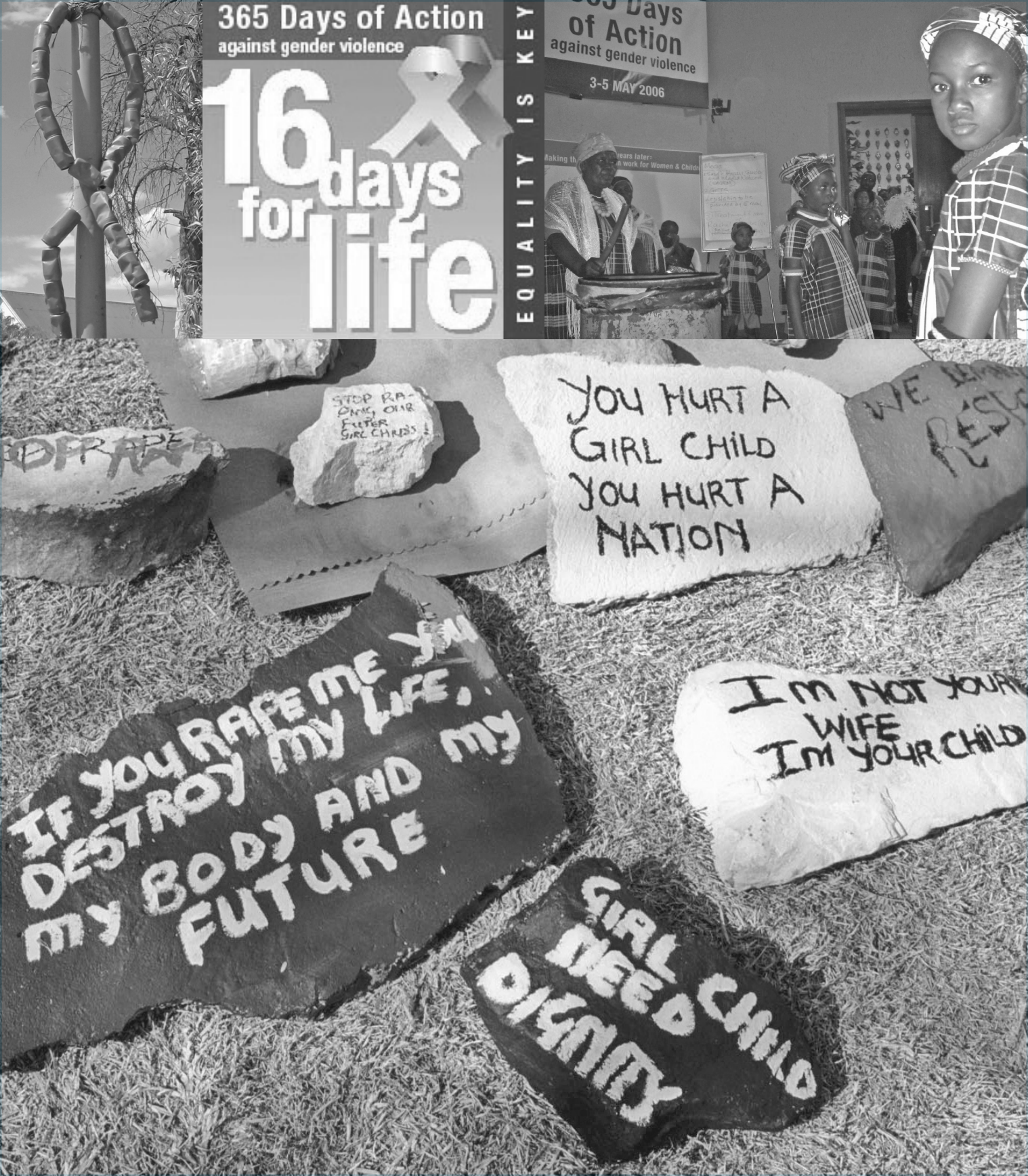
I attended school until the age of 18 when I got pregnant by him. I did not know that I was pregnant until my uncle's wife saw and asked me who the father of child was, but I didn't say anything. I was afraid to tell her it was her brother's child. She told me to go in the streets and look for the father of my child. I decided to tell her brother that I was pregnant with his child.

At first, he denied the child. He later accepted my pregnancy and told his sister I was expecting his child. However, the sister did not want to believe him or me and told me to go back to the farm. While I was at the farm I didn't get support from them and my uncle's wife kept on saying they will not support my child. They said all I wanted was to the take her brother for child maintenance, because I only wanted his money. During

my pregnancy, I suffered pain. I tried to be happy for my child so that I could not affect her with my pain.

Then my father heard about my pain and that I wanted to kill myself. My father helped me go through the whole thing, even when the baby girl was born. I came back to Windhoek and heard of father Herman. I registered myself to get food from him. My child is now staying with my biological mother who I met after 19 years. In the process, I found myself a job at the salon working as a shampoo girl.

Today I feel like am starting on the other side of the river and will never again turn back to my past life. What I want to do now is focus on my child's future because she needs love and attention from me. I am happy now. My advice is people should not sit with problems until they destroy you. People must seek for help earlier and shouldn't wait for help to come to them.


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