The South African

"I" Stories

experience

speaking out can set you free



by Gender Links

Gender Links (GL) is committed to a region in which women and men are able to participate equally in all aspects of public and private life in accordance with the provisions of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development.

The South African *"I" Stories* experience - Speaking out can set you free.

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Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Foreword 3

Chapter one

Introduction 5

Chapter two

What the stories say 13

Chapter three

"I" Stories in the media 39

Chapter four

Healing through writing 51

Chapter five

Where to from here? 63

Conclusion 66

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As with the *"I" Stories* publications, each writer's decision on anonymity is respected. Pseudonyms are denoted with an asterisk (*). The most special thanks goes to all of the women and men who over the years have shared their lives with us through the *"I" Stories*. They are an inspiration to all of us.

Foreword



Colleen Lowe Morna
GL Executive Director

What do you think of when you see a butterfly? Beautiful colours! Freedom after the struggle to break out of a cocoon! The sky is the limit! Reaching up; reaching out! These were just a few of the answers given by survivors of gender violence who have chosen to tell their stories through the GL *"I" Stories* project. The butterfly is the symbol of the *"I" Stories* brand that these women and men have created, as well as a profound metaphor for their lives.

The stories are powerful narratives of the pain of abuse, and very often the triumph of surviving and moving on. What they share - the slow realisation of a deteriorating relationship; social and cultural expectations; concern for children; feeling like there is nowhere to go; decisions to leave and the challenges of standing alone; demanding change and the overwhelming desire to speak out - echo thousands of more voices across the country and the region. These stories not only share a glimpse of individual experience, but together form an important body of knowledge into the reality of gender violence in Southern Africa.

These stories share women and men's real experiences with violence - domestic violence, child abuse, contracting HIV after sexual assault, being attacked because of their sexual orientation, and any other story that the women wish to tell. All these stories are powerful for different reasons; they are stories of abuse, but also of struggle and survival. For the writers they are empowering - telling their story often forms part of the transition from victim into survivor. For the media who pick up the stories it is a meaningful form of journalism to inform the public about gender based violence. For readers, the stories are often shocking and upsetting, yet through reading them, they become more aware of gender violence and its impact on their friends, families, and communities.

Consenting writers become first hand news sources for journalists. They are interviewed on radio and television talk shows as part of a deliberate strategy to make sure that they have ownership of their stories and experiences as opposed to being the subjects of research and analysis as so often is the case in the gender violence sector.

Through distributing the articles to the media through the GL Opinion and Commentary Service, the project has provided fresh news content that is otherwise difficult for news editors or journalists who chase tight deadlines to obtain. This is because finding women and men willing to tell their stories often involves a long process including working with counsellors. Many media outlets choose to highlight the stories in a special spread in the paper, usually alongside analytical commentary pieces, or offer several stories as a series throughout the Sixteen Days.

After five years of running the *"I" Stories* project, and as part of GL's monitoring and evaluation, we stepped back to assess how participating in this project had affected the women concerned. We also sought to understand better the power of this approach in our on-going campaigns on gender violence.

With some exceptions, evaluations of women who have participated showed that the process has been empowering. Women who have taken part have found the process therapeutic as they discover that they are not alone. While the stories talk about abuse, they are also about survival and therefore bring hope to many who may be in similar circumstances.

Gender violence is not the only area in which this project has potential. The *"I" Stories* provide the space for those whose authentic voices are marginalised to be heard. Be it on women in the media, the economy, women's experiences of poverty, HIV/AIDS and other concerns, the writing and publication of these first hand accounts or testimonies allows for a public discussion on the lived experiences of ordinary men and women.

This booklet is being launched during the 2010 Sixteen Days of Activism campaign, a critical year for reflection as we gear up to meet the target of halving gender violence by 2015 as set out in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. No voices can be more compelling than those of the women most directly affected. By listening to them, we sharpen our resolve, our strategies and our skills for ridding our region of the most flagrant, yet under-reported human rights violation of our time.



Colleen Lowe Morna
Executive Director, Gender Links.

Chapter one: Introduction





Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Fighting for gender equality.

The SADC Gender and Development Protocol adopted in August 2008 commits states to a whole range of actions to address gender violence. This includes enacting and *enforcing* prohibitive legislation, eradicating social, economic, cultural and political practices and religious beliefs that legitimise and exacerbate the persistence and tolerance of gender based violence, and adopting integrated approaches, including institutional cross sector structures, with the aim of reducing current levels of violence.

There is a need now to turn this progressive legislation into action on the ground. Leaders must show their ongoing commitment to the Protocol by allocating financial resources needed to put these actions into practice. However, violence is not just the responsibility of leaders and organisations, but of every individual and community. Many of these stories show that families and neighbours who keep quiet, or worse blame the victim, lead to devastating circumstances.

On the other hand, reaching out to help, to say no to violence can very truly change lives. By telling their story, each *"I" Story* undoubtedly helps expose the injustices that continue to harm not only individuals, but also society as a whole.

This chapter sets out the background to the *"I" Stories* project; the communication theories that underpin it; and the scope of this report.

Origins

The *"I" Stories* project began as part of the GL Sixteen Days of Activism Campaign in 2004 when GL worked with two separate groups of women and men to write their stories. One group consisted of women survivors of violence and the other of male rehabilitated perpetrators. GL

What is the Sixteen days campaign?

The Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign is a global advocacy campaign that runs from the 25 November to the 10 December each year. The campaign is premised on the principle that gender violence is a violation of women's human rights. Since its inception in 1991, the campaign has provided an opportunity for activists across the globe to put gender violence on the agenda over the 16 days. Key dates include:

- *25 November:* International Day of No Violence Against Women.
- *1 December:* World Aids Day.
- *3 December:* International Day for the Disabled.
- *6 December:* Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre, when a man gunned down 14 women engineering students for allegedly being feminist.
- *10 December:* International Human Rights Days.



Taking back the night during 16 Days.
Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

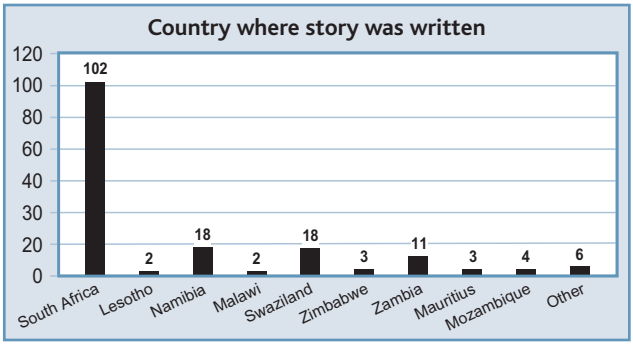
published the stories in a booklet and made them available to mainstream media. Since then the project has grown over time from providing ready-made content for print media to include content for television and radio programmes and online publications.

To date, GL has published the following *"I" Story* books:

- The "I" Stories: Polygamy - the heart of the matter 2009
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa Volume 4, 2009
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence, South Africa 2008
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence Namibia 2008
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence Swaziland 2008
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa, Volume 3, 2007
- The "I" Stories: City of Johannesburg Councillors Speak Out
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa, Volume 2, 2006
- The "I" Stories: Speaking out on gender violence in Southern Africa, Volume 1, 2004

This books resulted in 169 writers sharing their stories (21 shared the stories of local councillors perspectives on gender, and 21 shared the experiences of living in polygamous families, all the rest spoke specifically of how GBV had affected their lives). Women (90%) constituted the overwhelming majority of the writers.

As illustrated in the bar graph, approximately two thirds of the stories originated from South Africa and the rest from other SADC countries. During the 2010 Sixteen Days of Activism campaign GL intends to expand the scope of the *"I" Stories* across the region much more broadly.



Many survivors of violence feel that they are unable to speak about their experiences for negative consequences. This includes the fear of being ostracised and judged by their families and communities; the fear of retaliation through more violence; of not being believed; or of having to relive their trauma. Despite progressive legislation and

law reform, women's experience of the criminal justice system and the response by society as a result of cultural and social norms do not create the conditions in which survivors of violence feel safe enough to speak out about their experiences.

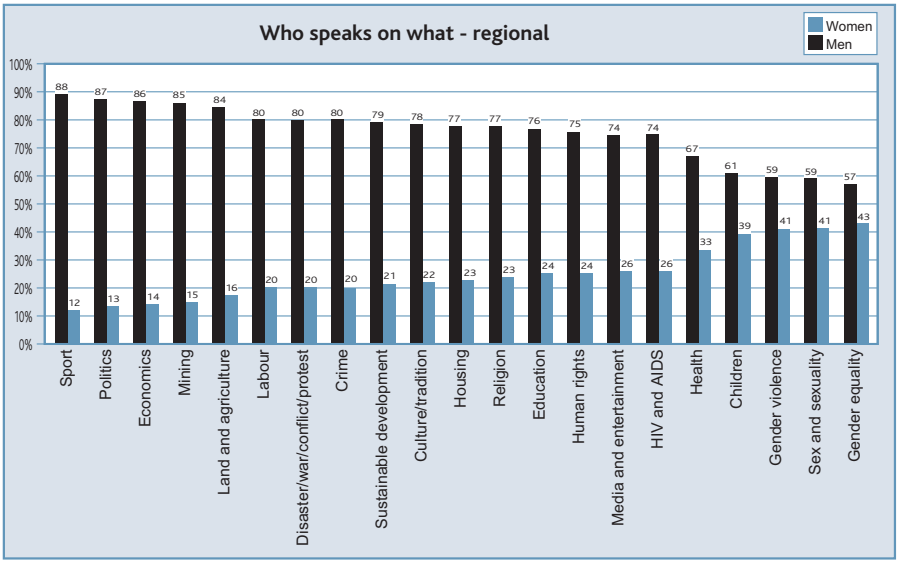


Media coverage of GBV is often sensationalist and trivialises the people's experiences of GBV, perpetuating rather than challenging society's attitudes and response to GBV. Many women themselves throughout the SADC region believe that GBV can be acceptable in certain circumstances, for example if a woman is adulterous.

Many women do not have the economic power to walk away from abusive relationships. There are also many women who make excuses for abusive partners, who feel that the abuse is their fault and who feel they cannot walk away.

The launch of the GL *"I" Stories* series in 2004 and subsequent editions every year since then has provided a positive outlet for first hand accounts and an alternative source of information and reporting on this issue that affects our entire community.

Media context and social exclusion



In August 2010, GL launched the Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS). The findings are disappointing, indicating that media still overwhelmingly reflect the views and voices of men. Overall, women constituted 19% of sources across the region; a mere 2% increase from 17% in the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS) in 2003. The graph shows that even in areas that overwhelmingly affect women, for example gender equality and gender violence, women still only comprise 42% of sources.

Participation and the personal narrative



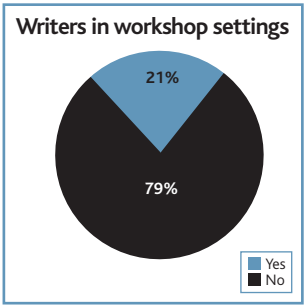
Photo: Gender Links

Supportive environment: GL's first *"I" Story* workshop in 2005.

Participation means that the people the communication or media is being designed for - women, children, migrants, people living with HIV, etc - are at the centre of deciding planning, and implementing the communication programme. Participatory approaches are not just about providing a space to contribute, but actually providing the tools and support to make such participation meaningful and possible. For example, inviting submissions related to how GBV affects individuals could produce an interesting selection of writing. However, since many of the women most affected lack the skills, tools, confidence, and space to be able to do so, this would be a questionable approach in terms of participatory communication.

By providing supportive workshops that guide participants through the process, in essence, helping to channel their thoughts and views onto paper in a way that they control the *"I" Stories* approach, ensures that participation is meaningful and possible - even language or literacy is not a barrier! Such participation is how those most excluded from media can be able to participate. On a social level, this not only provides a unique medium for media, which this report will demonstrate media actually knows it is missing, but also can play a powerful advocacy role.

The process



The creation of the *"I" Stories* is a multi-part process. Though stories are invited from across the region, and local partners encouraged to hold country workshops, available resources to date has meant that the main workshop for the programme usually occurs in South Africa. Due to the sensitive nature of the stories, and the need for the women to have coaching in a supportive environment, these workshops are vital to the process. Over three-quarters (79%) of the stories were written through GL's workshop process.

GL, in collaboration with organisations working with survivors of violence, invite participants who want to tell their story to a workshop co-facilitated with counsellors. In the supportive and open environment, survivors are more at ease to talk.

The women share their individual stories in small groups. For many women, this may be the very first time they have told someone about the abuse, and the session is often very painful. Afterwards, they each go away to write the first drafts of their stories, which are typed out and edited for them. In a second session, the women come together to read their own edited story, which is often very comforting. Once the editing is agreed upon, the women decide if they would like to use their own name in the by-line, if they want to have their photo taken, and if they would like to participate in other types of media, for example, personal appearances, radio or television interviews. The boundaries set by the women are ALWAYS respected. The finished stories are compiled into a book, as well as distributed to mainstream media.

Scope of this report

In celebrating the fifth year of the *"I" Stories*, GL felt it necessary to step back before stepping forward. Our contacts over this period with those who have participated in this series suggested many positive but in other cases not so positive outcomes. We needed to learn from these experiences.

In December 2009, even as equally gruesome, *"I" Stories* started to pour in ahead of the Sixteen Days, we decided to follow up on past participants in South Africa to get some idea of what effect speaking out has had on their lives. Some could not be traced. Others preferred not to continue to be associated with gender violence related work.

But the half who responded to the alumni call and spent a weekend writing follow up *"I" Stories* shared uplifting stories of what breaking out of the cocoon has meant for them. At least three have become counsellors at the shelters where they once took refuge. Rehana, an HIV positive Muslim woman, and participant in the very first *"I" Story* workshop, is now a well known advocate of disclosing one's HIV status.



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Mmatshilo Motsei facilitating the *"I" Stories* follow-up.

Participants at the weekend workshop pointed out that putting painful experiences to paper helps you to think through, understand, and come to terms with what has happened. Noting that "a story told is a burden shared" one participant said that reading other stories helped her realise that things could have been worse. Two participants said that documenting their experiences helped their perpetrators to see the light. In one case, in-laws, previously unaware of their son's conduct, came to apologise.

Ahead of this workshop and as part of qualitative work related to a GL project to develop indicators to measure GBV, GL analysed the stories of 55 survivors who GL has worked with mostly in the Gauteng province of South Africa, chronicled in four "butterfly" books, that include stories from other Southern African countries, and cover every race and age group. Insight from this analysis is also included in this report.

This current work also draws on a preliminary review exercise conducted by an intern with GL in 2008, published in the Gender and Media Diversity Journal on Media Activism.

This report is also based on the ongoing chronicling of the stories and insights survivors have shared with us through the years, as well as our own observations. Most of the profound changes are the ones that are difficult to capture on paper. As editors, writing assistants, and facilitators, we see the change from the first day that we meet the women and explain about the process, to the day their faces beam with pride when they see their story acknowledged and printed in a booklet.

Although GL has commissioned and distributed *"I" Stories* across the region since 2004, and in 2008 held country-based workshops, this report focuses on the South African experience, since this is where the majority of our workshops sessions have been held. However, recognising the diversity of the country, it also includes insights from non-nationals who participated in the South Africa workshops. It includes both stories gathered at the workshops or from writers who drafted their stories on their own and worked virtually with the editor.

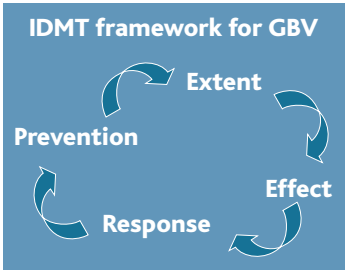
"These stories are not for your comfort, but are told with the rawness and pain with which they have been experienced. They will shock and upset you... But they will also give you hope. Hope that women in our region are speaking out. Hope that many years too late politicians have recognised that women's rights are human rights. Hope that our best bet in getting action taken is by breaking the silence."

- excerpted from the foreword, *"I" Stories* 2006

Chapter two: What the stories say



GL 2009 *"I" Stories* team: From left: Nwabisa Jama Shai; Sandra Ntebe; Naomi Blight; Gladys Muzirwa; and Deborah Walter. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*



Each writer tells his or her unique story. The 55 women whose stories were analysed ranged from the ages of 18 to 53 years. The perpetrators ranged from partners/husbands to strangers. Some women who were HIV positive attributed this to the violence they had experienced either in relationships or from gang rape. In some instances women reported their experiences of intimate partner violence to the police; seldom did the cases reach court and when they did a few of them got convictions. What the stories tell us is analysed using the South African government's Inter Departmental Management Team (IDMT) framework of extent; effects; response and prevention.

Extent

One in Nine

Globally it is estimated that one in every five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime (State of the World's Population, UNFPA 2005). In South Africa some 55 000 cases of rape related incidents are reported each year, but the Medical Research Council (MRC) estimates that the actual number may be nine times higher, around 500,000, as estimates suggest that only one in nine women report rape. More than 25% of South African men questioned in a 2009 survey by the South African Medical Research Council admitted to raping someone; of those, nearly half said they had raped more than one person. Three out of four who admitted rape were attacked for the first time during their teens.

Sexual and physical assault both by known (intimate) and unknown (non-intimate) perpetrators is commonly reported. Of the 55 stories surveyed in 2009, 16% related to the experience of assault by a known man. In most cases, the perpetrators used the fact that these women trusted or respected them and/or threatened to kill them if they shouted for help or told anyone. Seven women (16%) reported having been abused by an unknown man/group of men. They were more likely to have been raped and physical assault was involved. In two cases the women reported that they had been raped at knife/gun point as a means to restrain them during the assault.

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

Physical violence is the most prevalent form of abuse experienced by women in their intimate relationships with a male partner. This can be observed in the 61% of women (i.e., 27 out of 44 women) who said that they had experienced physical abuse by a

male sexual partner. In 36% of stories women mentioned that they had experienced emotional abuse from a male partner. 27% of women had been sexual assaulted. Sexual violence constituted rape or forced sex by the intimate male partner. In 30% of the stories women said that they has been economically/financially abused by their partner.



Photo: Janine Moolman

One in nine campaign during Sixteen Days Campaign, 2006.

In most instances women experienced different forms of violence in their intimate relationships. It was common that a woman would report that her partner not only physically but also emotionally/psychologically or verbally abused her. 31% of women reported both physical and emotional abuse from their partner. This relationship between these forms of abuse suggests that physical and emotional abuse are interwoven. In some cases women mentioned that physical abuse occurred amidst episodes of verbal slander from the partner regardless of whether emotional abuse preceded or occurred subsequently. Intimate relationships appear to be the breeding ground for physical and emotional abuse.

The stories that are told in these publications are extraordinary in the way they depict the unpredictable nature or manifestations of violence. The relationships had initially begun as loving and caring relationships where one of them even said that she had met her "prince charming". They could not predict the violence that eventually took place. In many of the relationships alcohol was one of the factors that were associated with the incidents of abuse. In a few cases when the woman told her partner that she was pregnant, his reaction would result in a physical or emotional abuse.

Violence comes in many disguises

Gender violence in South Africa is a problem that touches everyone, regardless of race, religion, income, or education. The women who have told their stories are employed and unemployed, shopkeepers, government workers, teachers, and every other profession. They are African, Indian and white, Christians, Muslims, Hindu, and non-religious. Some are economically poor, while others are affluent. The perpetrators share the same range, from the so-called provider that the community admires and family friends, to strangers

and neighbours. In her foreword to the 2008 *"I" Stories*, Sweetness Gwebu, who told her story in 2007 and has since become an active gender campaigner and writer, summed it up best:

> Gender violence knows no class, no age, no status core and no tradition. You may be poor as a church mouse, or be rich, living in a luxurious house, and still you have no peace if you are in an abusive situation. Abuse attacks like a slow poison and destroys you physically, mentally and spiritually. Abuse does not knock at the door when it comes, but it creeps in unexpectedly in a quite happy marriage and damages it, steady but sore. Abuse, in whatever form, drains the mind and one's self-esteem and leaves you helpless and brainwashed, hoping for an undefined change of the situation.

Many writers observed this in their own stories, pointing out that there are very complex reasons that make it difficult for women to escape fromm abusive situations.

> 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.
> - Finding myself again, Nicole Alexandra Rice

I had a choice to stop the cycle of abuse, a privilege that same women in my position do not have. I was empowered and fully aware of my rights as a woman, a person and a citizen. I knew all the steps I could take to report domestic violence in my community,



42 Mail&Guardian November 28 to December 4 2008

16 Days of Activism

Healing body and soul

Germina Setshedi

I am a mother of four children. I used to live with them and my husband.

My husband was jealous and cruel but I did not realise that at the time. He used to beat me up for nothing. I sometimes wondered if I was born to suffer.

I cried every day and prayed for years, asking God to change my life for the better. Instead, my problems got worse.

I had given up on having any chance of happiness. He would strangle me and I would cry and he would tell me to stop making a noise.

I tried to tell him that his behaviour made me feel inadequate and unhappy but that caused a big fight.

The violence continued for a long time. But on Sunday September 7 1998 things changed. Two days after a car knocked down my son, he was admitted to hospital with a head injury. My husband was not around. When I was about to leave the house, he came in and locked the door, swearing and pointing at me. He pushed me until he threw me out of the fourth-floor window. My legs and my spine were broken. I spent three months in a hospital, sleeping.

When I was discharged, I opened a case against him but nothing was done because my husband was friends with one of the police officers. I stayed with my younger sister and he kept phoning, telling me to come back. I was using crutches and could not move my body because the plasters were heavy.

He would come to the house knowing that my sister was at work and the children were at school. He would kick the door, open it and tell me he wanted me at home. All that I could do was sit and cry.

I moved back home and after three days he started swearing and pointing at me again. It was the beginning of the end. One day he hit me with a hammer on my head. I was bleeding profusely. I saw that as an opportunity to get him arrested.

I was still on crutches, so with the help of my neighbours the police were called.

I opened a case and they sent him to "San City" (Johannesburg) prison. He was on trial for three months. He asked for forgiveness and I forgave him. After the hearings, he did not sleep at home, only coming during the day. I trusted in God and prayed all the time: "God help me because this man is going to kill me."

Nothing changed. I stayed in that horrible life. He stopped eating at home, came home late and sometimes not at all. Life in that house was that way until he left.

I found out he was in love with my neighbour's daughter and they have a baby boy. But I don't care. He is unhappy and wants to come back. But there is no space in my house anymore.

I remember my mother's words, before she died: "What are you doing with that hooligan, [he is] a thug and a monster."

Now he doesn't have a place to sleep. He wants me to assist him but I won't. I have a choice to stop the cycle of abuse, a privilege that some women in my position do not have.

I am empowered and fully aware of my rights as a woman, a human being and a citizen.

I now give advice to survivors of domestic and others forms of violence in my community because what I would like most is to have a good, normal life like anyone else.

I have a choice to stop the cycle of abuse, a privilege that some women in my position do not have

This story is part of the I Stories series produced by the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service for the 16 Days of Activism on Gender Violence

Germina Setshedi's story appeared in the *Mail and Guardian*.

but distanced myself from this practice and suffered in silence. I did not tell anybody about my husband who was abusive. - When abuse can lead to disability, Germina Setshedi

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. - Date rape can happen to anyone, Cara Ann.

The war at home

Of the 55 stories surveyed in 2009, 70% reported that the abuse took place in intimate relationships with a man compared with 16% who said that an acquaintance or relative abused them. In most instances women experienced different forms of violence in their intimate relationships. It was common that a woman would report that her partner not only physically but also emotionally/psychologically or verbally abused her. This relationship between these forms of abuse suggests that physical and emotional abuse are interwoven. In some cases women mentioned that physical abuse occurred amidst episodes of verbal slander from the partner.

In many cases the abuse escalates to being life threatening.

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, plugged 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. - Walking away with nothing, By Mmabatho Moyo,* South Africa

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. - Healing on the outside, but still scarred within, By Harriet Nhlapo

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 sjambok. 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!" - Finding strength is not easy, Puni Matsimbi



Survivor Gugu Mofekeng's story on Women 24.

He then began to beat me, he grabbed me by my hair and bit off a part of my left ear and tried to bite off another piece, leaving my ear in two pieces. He was also poking my eyes, he pulled my hair and when I broke free, he was holding a klump of my hair in this hand. On top of it all he also stabbed me in the head. After a mammoth struggle, I was able to run away and 15 minutes later, my house was on fire. - Losing everything and finding myself, Gugu Mofokeng

The stories that are told in these publications are extraordinary in the way they depict the unpredictable nature or manifestations of violence. All of the relationships had initially begun as loving and caring. They could not predict the violence that eventually took place. For many women it is this intimate betrayal that leaves the longest lasting scars.

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, to an aggressive, arrogant and some-what diabolical monster. 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. - Finding strength is not easy, Puni Matsimbi

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. - Nicole Alexandra Rice, Finding myself again

Childhood sexual abuse

For some of the writers, their painful memories went back many years, to their childhoods.

When I was eight years old, we were playing house with my friends when an older man (a friend of my brothers) got into the bed with me and raped me. He told me not to cry or make a noise. At the time I did not know what was happening to me. I felt so afraid and guilty. When I took a bath that night, my mother noticed the blood on my panties. She asked me to open my legs and checked me, but then said nothing. I have lived with this terrible guilt all my life. I have tried to block it out but when the same thing happened to my daughter several years later, it all started to come back…My daughter was raped when she was six years old and my husband blamed me for it. I was so devastated I wanted to die. He used to tell my daughter that she was stupid that is why they raped her. Whenever he said those words, I felt a sharp pain piercing my heart. I thought of all the pain my father caused me and my mom. - I am angry, but I am also a survivor, Nono Tintela



26 SUNDAY TRIBUNE NEWS NOVEMBER 26 2006

Women face discrimination from the men

MARKING 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Scarred by a childhood fantasy

Nono Tintenla's story in the *Sunday Tribune*.

The following is another example of abuse that began in childhood:

I should begin by revealing my childhood and this would be scary stuff. My parents were good to me yet harsh to each other, which was triggered by my father's extra marital affairs. My mother kept silent as she was afraid of my dad throughout the abuse. There were times when he would burn her clothes and hit her, leaving long-term bruises and scars. I felt helpless and hopeless watching. I was only 7 years old. Now I am 30 and reliving this nightmare. - Violence tears a family apart, Sandy*

> Sadly, in many instances rape is almost considered inevitable. My mother told me that I must forget about it because she and my grandmother had been raped. This is something that just happens in the family. After that day it was never talked about. No one asked me how I felt. As a result I felt dirty and had low self-esteem.
> - Rape will not be my daughter's legacy!, Thandeka*

Four women (8%) said that they had been abused by their parent. The abuse that two women experienced from their fathers was more related to the domestic violence which later precipitated to the children. These cases are evidence that in relationships where there are children, they are affected by domestic abuse and may end up being the victims of physical abuse. In one case the woman still harboured feelings of disappointment by her fathers' behaviour because she had worshipped and honoured him.

Mothers also contributed to the violence that women went through. One woman described herself as a dedicated breadwinner who had dreams to remove her family from poverty and "build" a home for her mother and her sibling. This dream turned into a nightmare for their relationship when she had a child, who eventually died due to acts that she attributed to her mother's bizarre behaviour. The parental relationships described in these stories indicate a great deal of the traditional role that children played in their homes; that they could not challenge and let alone stand up for themselves against their parents even when it was necessary to do so.

One of the young women lost her five month old baby because her mother used her position to control access to her child. It may be that the emotional effects of those relationships contributed to the perpetuation of abuse in those families.

Women who had been raped described repeated rape that was perpetrated in intimate relationships or by strangers. The effects of repeated rape also carried emotional and mental health effects on the women who experienced it. Some of the women felt despondent to deal with even the other kinds of violence that they experienced. This profoundly suggests that the risk of experiencing violence increases from the first time a woman becomes a victim.

Economics of abuse

Many women report a tendency in intimate relationships of the male partner insisting the women stopped working in order to fulfil their traditional roles. In turn, the same men would not provide financial support for food, clothes for the children, and other things, their partners would either not provide or stall in responding to their needs.

These financial woes varied by the extent to which they were imposed on the women. Child maintenance was a serious issue for some women and precipitated the tolerance of violence in the relationships.

> 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 have found my voice, Annah Maduma Matshidiso



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Annah Maduma Matshidiso.

> 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 were earning a salary. 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 all right". 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 refused he beat me. I used to sleep outside to hide. - By Gladys Dlamini, Taking a stand*

In many stories, women allude to their worry about being able to provide for themselves and their children should they leave. They were concerned with how they would be unable to meet basic needs if they left the relationship. Some had such low self-esteem as their partners had told them how they would never get a job because of their age and how useless they had been.

> 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 me. 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? - Locked in a loveless marriage, Daphne Butele*

For many, separation also means leaving their economic source behind.

I went ahead with filing for a divorce and succeeded. However, what was painful was that I did not get anything out of our 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. - Walking away with nothing, Mmabatho Moyo*

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.
- Now I see the light, Lindiwe Ngoya*

I went to our house in the beginning of 2008 to check who was staying there. I found out that other people were renting the house, as he was not able to sell it to them without my signature. He had sold them everything that was inside the house, including my furniture and I was left with nothing except my family and my child. - Life will never be the same, Sindie Bless*

Mmabatho Moyo's* rapist showed up looking for his child after she gave birth to a baby girl:

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 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.

Xenophobia

Every year, thousands of people migrate within Southern Africa's borders, mostly looking for better opportunities, and mostly destined for the region's economically

strongest country, South Africa. Yet, migration brings with it many challenges. Many face xenophobic discrimination. Often without proper documentation and with few employment prospects, they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, particularly women.



LIVING IN FEAR AND DESPAIR

She left one form of imprisonment in Zim for another

He became aggressive, violent and stronger - I could not take his hands of me. He pushed me on the bed. He had totally changed from the man I know to a monster. This man touched me everywhere he kissed me and forced me to have sexual intercourse with him without protection. He threatened to kill me or even hand me to the police to be deported if I tell my sister.

Whenever an official of some sort asks for my papers, I always ask in return if there is anything I can do for him. The issue surrounding my status in this country disappears after simply performing a few "favours" in a store room or in a dark alley. The darker the place, the better - that way I don't have to see his face, and as soon as it is over I can go about my business until the next time... - Using my body for freedom, Mooshoo*

A young Congolese woman who was raped by three men while walking home from school received a discriminatory line of questioning from a social worker who was handling her case. The social worker asked her why she had left her own country in the first place, suggesting that perhaps had she not been a foreigner in South Africa she would not have experienced rape.

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. - A long and difficult path from home, Rachel Lilongile*

For others, xenophobia or their vulnerable position as migrants means lack of access to protection.

The problem I have is that one of these people sharing my home is a stubborn man who abuses my wife almost every day, verbally and physically. He is also a foreigner, but not from the same country as mine. I work sometimes at night, so it is difficult for me to always be there to protect her. Last week, it was Sunday around 9pm. My wife heard my daughter crying out, and when she rushed to see what the problem was, she found that this man had pushed his way into the toilet, where my young daughter was inside... We hoped the police would assist us, and arrest the man. However, after listening for a short time, the officers told us that they are sick and tired of us foreigners. They said, "If the xenophobia attacks can come again, it's better, then you will all go back to your countries." - Xenophobia means no protection, Alain Kasanda*

Sexual orientation

Lesbians in South Africa face a dangerous environment. Especially in the black community, "corrective" or "curative" rape is believed to convert them to heterosexuality. A report by the international NGO ActionAid, backed by the South African Human Rights Commission, published in March 2009 condemned a culture of impunity around these crimes, which it says are going unrecognised by the state and unpunished by the legal system. Some say that an increasingly macho political environment is even further contributing to the problem. Another report released in 2008 by Triangle, a leading South African gay rights organisation, revealed that a staggering 86% of black lesbians from the Western Cape said they lived in fear of sexual assault. Along with sexual assault, lesbians also face physical assault in their communities, solely because of their sexual orientation.

Three riveting stories written in 2007 told of the brutality and misogyny experienced by lesbians in the only country in the world in which sexual orientation is protected by the Constitution and the only country in Africa to have legalised same sex unions.



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Keba Sebetoane.

Keba Sebetoane told her story of being raped by a man she thought was her friend.

> I got a bit tense when he started giving me the 'you make me sick look'. He locked the door. I was really confused he was swearing me and saying how much he hates people who pretend. I then asked him what he was talking about. He was furious with the lesbian life I was living.

He said that I should stop taking other people's girlfriends and that I was beautiful and capable of getting myself a boyfriend. I got angry and started arguing back. He slapped me on the face, and warned me not to shout at him or will regret it. He said: " Tonight I'm going to change you, and as from now on you are my girlfriend."

Added to this is the secondary traumatisation facing lesbian, resulting from discriminatory attitudes of service providers. Seboatane went on to say:

I told him [the doctor] that the guy raped me because I was a lesbian. As soon as he heard this he stopped writing and posed questions regarding my sexuality. He said: "Why are you a lesbian at this age? Do you know that it is against the constitution to make such a decision without the consent of a parent? You are wearing a cross of Christ, did you know that it is an abomination in the eyes of God to be lesbian." - Who are you to tell me who I am?, Keba Seboatane

Lindiwe Radebe was attacked with a group of friends by several men.

They surrounded me and started kicking me and continued calling me names. I remember one of them said "You think you're a man wena stand up and fight!" I could not do anything. This went on for a couple of minutes. It was terrible. I only managed to stand up through God's mercy. But one of them continued slapping me and hitting me with fists while the other one attempted to throw a stone at my face. Fortunately, I managed to block the stone from hitting my face with my left hand but my thumb was hurt and was seriously bleeding. - Is it a crime to be a woman who loves other women?, Lindiwe Radebe



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

A survivor, Lindiwe Radebe.

She also recalls the re-victimisation by police officers who attended to her at the police station where she went to report the incident. Upon learning about her sexual orientation, the officer's attitude abruptly changed.

I vividly remember him changing his facial expression. He looked at me and exclaimed "What?" I repeated what I had said before - "I am lesbian". He stared at me again. My friend got irritated and answered on my behalf. She reiterated "She said we are lesbian". Then the real emotional trauma began. He started giving a lecture about how wrong and unholy it is to be a lesbian. I became really angry

and asked him if he wanted to help me or not. He told me that I had an attitude problem and that is when I asked to see the station commander.

Gay men are also not immune. Oliver Meth was brutally raped by one of the three men who robbed him; the police did not take his case seriously.



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Oliver Meth.

I was taken to the local police station, which came to a standstill when they saw me covered in blood and smelling of semen. The police officer asked me, "What happened?" He asked me this in front of everyone - and I didn't want them to hear. I thought "What a jerk!" I was interviewed by a male police officer who tapped his fingertips on the table, yawning and sighing. The second police officer couldn't spell to save his life. The docket went missing. Evidence got lost. - Not all rape survivors are women, Oliver Meth

Effects

Economic effects

Many women reported a tendency in intimate relationships for the male partner to insist on the women stopping work in order to fulfil their traditional roles. In turn the same men would not provide financial support for food and clothes for the children. Their partners would either not provide or stall in responding to their needs. These financial woes varied by the extent to which they were imposed on the women. Child maintenance was a serious issue for some women and precipitated the tolerance of violence in the relationships.

One woman mentioned that her husband even came back to her and her children from having lived with a girlfriend for months under the pretext of wanting to make peace and in the following months got them to sell their house and she found out that the transaction went through when the sheriff of the court gave her a notice to vacate the house. Her husband had disappeared by that time.

A woman recalled how she and her husband both worked and her husband told her that she needed to give him her salary because he had paid lobola for her. When she challenged him about this she reported that she would call her "name" and once he even beat her because she would not give him money to buy headache tables when

he had a hangover. The economic abuse was prominent in this relationships as the man eventually stopped working, got her to pay for his unfinished enrolment at school, his driving lessons, and disappeared for two months with a R30,000 cheque that was her retrenchment package.

In one of the stories a woman described how she lost everything that she had worked for when she left her abusive husband. This in part alludes to the reason some of the women in financially abusive situations stayed. They were concerned with how they would be unable to meet basic needs if they left the relationship. Some had such low self-esteem as their partners had told them how they would never be get job because of their age and how useless they had been.

Long-lasting physical affects and disability

Women who contributed to the "*I*" *Stories* mentioned a myriad of experiences that affected them physically, not just during the violence but also long after. Many women reported that the violence left them with physical scars that range with severity. For women, these scars are a source of shame, especially if they are on the face, arms, or other visible area.



Photo: Gender Links

Marco Ndlovu, after an assault.

An older woman recalled that she was bedridden for over a week due to the assault she got from her husband. Further to the series of violence episodes in her life she sustained a broken eardrum from one of the beatings. Another woman lost her baby during pregnancy as a result of a beating from her partner. Despite this the physical abuse continued.

For Germina Setshedi, the abuse led to lifelong disability. Worse still, with nowhere to go she returned to her husband, who continued the abuse:

> He started pushing me. He pushed me until he threw me out of the window. It was from the 4th floor to the ground. Both my legs and my spine were broken. I spent three months in a General Hospital sleeping. When I came out of the hospital, I opened a case against him but nothing was done because my husband was friends with one of the officers... I moved back home to my husband. Oh... oh... oh... God, after three days he had started swearing and pointing at me again. Remember by that time I could not walk fast, I was still on crutches. That was the beginning of the



Photo: Gender Links

Germina Setshedi is a survivor.

end. One day he hit me with a hammer on my head. I was bleeding so badly and that was a good chance to get him arrested. - When abuse can lead to disability, Germina Setshedi

Healed on the outside, but hurting within

Along with physical affects, women experience a number of psychological effects which range from low self-esteem to attempted suicide. One woman reported that after she had endured a number of occasions of physical abuse from her husband, she was publicly humiliated when her husband continued to hit her in front of onlookers and passers-by in their community. She despondently described how the same people who had helped her before during one of the episodes of abuse from her partner did not come to her rescue again during this incident. It was her son who stood up for her. This attests to the way in which violence can perceived to be a norm and the role that the community's silence against abuse can perpetuate violence taking place in relationships.

A woman who was later convicted of having arranged the murder of her abusive husband, following a life of abuse where she was forbidden from seeing her children, was prevented from working because she would have extra-marital affairs. She recalled another incident where "he told me to undress in front of his employees with the intention of raping me." When she refused he insulted her and raped her.

The effects of repeated rape also carried emotional and mental health effects on the women who experienced it. Some of the women felt despondent to deal with even the other kinds of violence that they experienced. This profoundly suggests that the risk of experiencing violence becomes increased from the first time a woman becomes a victim.

For many women, the long-lasting emotional scars run deep.

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. - Healing on the outside, but still scarred within, Harriet Nhalpo

For survivors, deeply held anger can be the worst pain of all.

I am angry at our justice system for not protecting women and children. I am angry at our courts for releasing these monsters back into our homes. I am angry

at the man who raped me as a child and now walks the streets as a respected politician. I am angry at the man who made me pregnant and then walked away, leaving me so angry towards my first daughter (now twenty years old) with whom I have never been able to bond. I am angry at all men for treating us like door mats. I am angry at my father for not protecting me. Worst of all, I am angry at myself for not protecting my second daughter when the very same thing that happened to me, happened to her. - I am angry, but I am also a survivor, Nono Tintela

Violence in the home affects children

Violence in the home inevitably affects children. In many cases abuse that begins between adults results in children being physically assaulted, or emotionally traumatised by the abuse.

One day when he hit me, she [my daughter] made me run into the guest bedroom and closed the door. It was around 8pm. She was still very small, but she stood at the door for almost two hours. I kept on telling her to come and sleep, but she could not. She told me "if I leave the door, Papa would come in and hit you." Another day he beat me so hard that I started bleeding from my nose. When my daughter saw how I was bleeding, she stood at the gate and started calling for the neighbours to come and help me. - For the sake of my child, Saphia

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 clean for me, she was afraid he was going to beat me again if I did not clean it up... 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. - Locked in a loveless marriage, Daphne Butele,* South Africa



Photo: Gender Links

Pascal Akimina, children are affected by violence.

When he started beating my mother he would turn to my sisters, and me, beating us, chasing us away, saying that we were ugly like my mother, we were stupid, we

were nothing. I grew up with a lot of anger and hurt towards my father and, until today, I am still finding ways of dealing with it and forgiving him. He used to beat my mother almost to death. When she talked to her family and elder women, they said that is how you build the house! You must stay; he will change. - Honouring my mother and sister, Pascal Akimana

GBV, HIV and AIDS are closely linked

Out of the twenty stories produced in 2006 alone, six women reported contracting HIV as a result of sexual abuse. Rose Thamae was first raped as a child and then gang-raped twice as a young woman. Learning about their HIV status had profound impact on their well-being and initially affected their sense of security and sense of self.



Photo: Gender Links

Know your status.

I was raped again by five boys behind Orlando Stadium. My friends and I were coming from the stadium. They managed to run away. I was not so lucky. I didn't escape: they raped me. I went home and told my family. They said it was my fault: why didn't I run away like the others... One day, as we were coming from the cinema, very happy, a gang of young men, carrying *pangas* and knives pounced on us. My boyfriend ran away and left me with these monsters. I tried to fight, but I was stabbed in the back and in my head. I lay there with blood all over me. They raped me one by one. They had no mercy at all. No one could hear me screaming as it was an open space. After gang raping me they left me there... Two years later, in 1990, I was diagnosed as HIV positive. The world was falling apart. - From HIV victim to AIDS activist, Rose Thamae

Before being raped I hadn't had a partner since my divorce in 1996. I just had a HIV test done and it came back negative. So I told myself there's no way you can be raped once and get it and I said I'm not going to bother going back and I didn't bother. Last year in January something just told me: "Hey Mickey just go and test yourself." I had a boyfriend who wanted to get married so we both went for tests. His was negative and I was positive. What do I do, where do I start, where do I go? - I'm doing well and surviving, Mickey*

However, these are not just stories of despair. Rose Thamae's daughter and granddaughter also write their stories, and together these were showcased as "Three Generations of Courage." These remarkable three women have spearheaded "Let Us Grow" a community-based organisation in Orange Farm that cares for people living with HIV, and promotes awareness in the community.

Telling my story made me feel strong. I keep telling my stories again and again to my kids, to my friends, to my neighbours, to the world. I have learned that if bad things happen to you it is not the end. I find strength in my work. Each week there is a funeral to attend. But there is also a life being saved; a new lease of life being given.



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Three generations of courage.

Her daughter Mpho, was at first devastated by the news that her mother was living with HIV.

At that time I was working as a stylist at a hair salon. Every day when I arrived home I found everyone happy with no stress at all. Instead they had new information, were planning a future and were strong. I wanted to know what kept her happy. I was told that she was attending a support group at Aids Link. I found that the person I was most worried about (my daughter) had organised young children to do dramas, poems and dancing. She was teaching people about HIV/AIDS and abuse. I asked myself why I was worried about my mother, she was fine. I started to accept that my mother is not just HIV positive: she is positive!

Writing her story at 13, Kgomotso Thamae showed that one is never too young to be an activist.

I asked my friends about us starting a support group to help children who are in need. They agreed with me. Our first trip was to Nkosi's Haven to visit children who are HIV positive to show them that there are children outside who love them; who care for them; who pray for them. When we came back, people joined us because they were touched by what we had done. There are ten people in our group. We have activities like dancing, singing, drama and much more. - An activist at 13, Kgomotso Thamae

Response

The justice system is failing women

Of the 55 stories survey in 2009, 30 women (56%) reported that their abusive experiences had reached the attention of the police. For most of the women if the abuse occurred within an intimate relationship, their intention for reporting was not

to get their husband arrested but rather out an immediate stop to the violence. For many who wanted to press charges, they were persuaded not to. Less than half of the cases (14) reached the court system. Only one case (2%) resulted in a conviction.

One woman attested to how the criminal justice system was failing South African women in the post-apartheid era. She even had a list of occasions on how the criminal justice system consistently failed her in her court battle for the custody of her children. For many years she had been lodged in a court fight with her husband, who always managed to outwit her. She blamed lawyers for manipulating the findings of the psychologist she was referred to, undermining the extent of abuse she had endured in the relationship.



Photo: Gender Links

Mamokhothu Santho.

> To my horror all the lodged dockets went missing at the magistrate's court. I believe that my ex-husband used connections to hide all the vital information: court book, charge sheet, tapes, and dockets. The documents were eventually found and my ex-husband was fined a mere R4000, compared to the R20 000 that I spent in my quest for justice….I am at a dead end where to turn to for legal representation and help. For three years I have been waiting for the outcome of my complaint with the Free State Law Society about a lawyer who has contributed to the delay in my obtaining justice. I am breaking my silence during the Sixteen Days of Activism to help me overcome the torture that for more than a decade has crippled me emotionally, physically and financially. If there is anyone out there listening, my question to you is: where is justice, when a woman who is abused ends up losing everything, including her own children? - South Africa: What justice!, Mamokhothu Santho

These 55 stories reflect the reality written in most of the stories in and out of South Africa - the justice system is woefully failing victims of gender violence, something repeatedly mentioned by survivors.

> The police would come to my house and tell us to solve our problems. Then they would leave me at the house for him to finish me off. The three court interdicts against my husband did not help me. He simply ignored them and the police seemed powerless to act. Ironically it was I and my daughter who ended up in the police cells. I have never been arrested but I have slept in police cells for more

times than I can count so that I and my daughter would be safe. - I am angry, but I am also a survivor, Nono Tintela



When finding strength is not easy

By Puni Matsimbi, South Africa

In memory of my son Marcelus (1988-09-07 to 2006-03-19)

I liked him a lot. He had entered like a nice man. Unlike other boys who refused to, he danced with the ladies-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.

The story of our 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 eventually relationship, and when he proposed marriage, I accepted.

That is when everything changed. From the sweet, nonchalant-initiatory and charming young man whom I believed truly loved me, to an aggressive, arrogant and somewhat diabolical monster. From the young man who had wanted nothing but happiness for me, to this man whose passion was violence and who wanted nothing but misery for me.

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 step or my mother's.

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 nightie. As he made those accusations, he hit me with everything that was within his reach and sight – the poker from the stove, fists, kicks and even a table.

He locked me off even. Raped 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 loud pounding against the locked door.

My crying and the beating against the door did not stop him. I tried 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 again and broke my eardrum. Just as he had before, my eldest son pleaded with his father to forgive me. He begged him to stop, but his father threw him away. The next day he would tell me, I had to know before what 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 shortlived. 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.

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

I lost the job and spent many days at home before finding another. I heard about SHAA (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 work with women and children suffering from 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 abuse.

I want men to know that abuse is a crime.

Thinking the pain had ended, I was happy. Then, tragedy struck. In March 2006, a car hit my youngest son Marcelus. He was taken to hospital,

Puni Lydia Matsimbi

Puni Matsimbi's story in *The Southern Times*.

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. - Finding strength is not easy, Puni Matsimbi

While the statistics are grim, perhaps more telling are the words of women who work as counsellors and witness the impact of the justice system on survivors

Just like the stories told in the *"I" Stories*, I see how the inherent injustices and unfairness of the criminal justice system continue to haunt a lot of women we work with. But we do not have the power to give women the verdicts that they want in court. Sometimes some of our clients end up being killed, murdered, shot, and as a counsellor you begin to ask yourself, what could I have done differently? - Survivors courage breaks the cycle, Maureen Xaba

In some cases, while the woman's appeals for help go unanswered, ironically she finds herself accused of being perpetrator.

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. - Healing on the outside, but still scarred within, Harriet Nhlapo

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. - Dreams that become a nightmare

Perhaps even more frightening, is when the perpetrator himself is police officer. 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. - When a policeman turns abuser, Thandi Mkhize*

Support

The SADC Gender Protocol commits to ensuring that support services are in place for survivors of GBV, including sexual assault. However, along with any official and government sponsored support, it is clear that there is much work to be done with communities and families. At best there is a tendency to downplay the rape, and at worst survivors are still blamed for the crime itself.

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, 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. - Date rape can happen to anyone, Cara Ann

Coming back from the shops, a man was following me. He came to me and said that I should follow him or else he will kill me. I felt a gun on my back, so I had no choice. He took me to his place in Berea. There he raped me…she said that I was not raped, but that it was my boyfriend. She managed to tell everyone at home that I was lying, saying that I was raped. Everyone believed her story. Can you believe this? Even my best friend believed the whole story. - When a Child is Raped, Natasha Kangale.



Photo: Trevor Davies

As I write this story, I am living in a shelter where I am getting help to lay charges and pursue my case. Because this is a case of date rape, or rape by someone I know, I am getting very little co-

operation from the police, who fail to understand how you can be raped by someone you know. Even though my rapist is well known, he has not been apprehended. - One man's love eases the pain of another's assault, Proudia Mosupi

Prevention

Cultures of silence

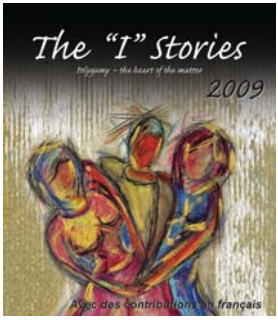
Deeply-rooted patterns of patriarchy and gender equality in cultural and traditional practices often render women even more vulnerable to abuse.

He forced me to have sex with him. If I said I was tired he forced me or beat me and said he paid ***lobola*** for me. I must give him anything that he wants. - Glady Dlamini, Taking a Stand

Being a woman is one thing and being a Muslim woman is another. Muslim women are supposed to obey their husband, we do not have any say in whatever decision one made in our homes... I do not think my story is any different from many other women. Women have been abused for many years, and l think it is time we say no to the abuse. - For the sake of my child, Saphia

At age 14 years, my dad passed away and poverty grew intensely, and so did the abuse [from my brothers]... To me, this was how Indian girls grew up and it seemed normal. When I finished matric my mum found an escape for myself and that would be marriage. I was not allowed to study afterwards, as it was not what Indian girls did. I was married off against my wishes... At first the marriage was a perfect bed of roses. Then, the alcohol and abuse started. The dominating behaviour took off like a jumbo jet. The verbal, psychological, emotional, financial and sexual abuse became a normal thing in my marriage. There was no way of getting out of the marriage. To get out meant going back to the abuse that I left. Indian girls do not leave their marital home at all. Their cultural beliefs and myths were that they stick to their marriage and endure all, no matter what. - Turning Life around, Alisha Maharaj*

My story is about culture, belief systems, early marriage and alcohol abuse that negatively affected my life as a teenager. My children paid the price as well. My story however has a happy ending. Allow me to give voice to my story...While growing up as a typical South African Indian girl, deeply held morals, values, and belief systems were passed on to me. I had to fulfill my parents wishes. That mainly meant I had to get married, have children, be a slave to my husband and his family. I did this for 17 long, dreadful and painful years. - Not a victim, a survivor, Sally Kisten*



Although still widely practiced both in Africa and around the world, the practice of polygamy is seldom spoken of. Just in time for South Africa's Heritage Day 2009, celebrated on 24 September, GL launched *"I" Stories - Polygamy: The Heart of the Matter*. In South Africa, the issue leapt to center stage during the run up to the 2009 presidential elections. Heading into the polls, the polygamous lifestyle of Jacob Zuma, leader of the African National Congress (ANC), became a hotly debated topic of discussion, especially amongst gender and women's rights activists. Media focused on such logistical matters as security costs and which wife would accompany the new President during official functions. Traditionalists argued cultural choice, while gender activists questioned polygamy's place in a constitutional democracy.

Amongst all the debate, the voices and the views of those most "in the know," the women and men living in polygamous relationships were virtually non-existent. Recognising the importance of these missing voices, GL embarked on this "I" Stories project, to collect personal accounts of women, men and children from polygamous unions. These accounts offer food for thought about gender and gender equality, and question some of our assumptions about polygamy. It's a choice say proponents - but stories show women who expected to be the only wife, women pressured by husbands and family, or who lacked the economic power to disagree - and none of these offer choice, even if the person says "yes." Yet, some accounts show there can be a different side, with families living in harmony. They also show that rigid gender roles not only cause problems for women, but men also. As it stands, men face incredible pressure to reproduce quickly, provide for families, and be the glue that holds the family together. Yet, overall the stories seem to suggest that the inherent inequality in polygamous relationships can leave women vulnerable to physical, emotional and economic abuse, by both the husband and extended family.

> I found out that his family was happy that there were two wives in the family. The problem was that he did not take good care us. He did not know how to give us the same love. My husband used to beat me with a stick. The only person who used to feel sorry for me was my mother in-law... Me, I'm fed up with polygamy life. I do not prefer polygamous relationships to my children. Polygamy is not good at all. - I did not know it's difficult, Zodwa Zitha*

In the worst cases, some hide behind culture as a way to perpetuate the worst kinds of abuse.

My stepfather used to come to me and say he wanted to sleep with me, saying that I was his second wife. He used to do this when my mother was very drunk. When I told my mother, she would insult and yell at me.

Perhaps, because of these long-held beliefs and traditions of silence, along with police and the justice system, families and communities are also reluctant to intervene.

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 off my feet and I fell down. His younger brother was present and he did not help me. - When a policeman turns abuser, Thandi Mkhize

I related the whole story of her abusive husband. Instead of comforting me, she became angry, was angry at me, and even accused me of seducing her husband. She told me l was loose and that is why l had a child at home out of wedlock. Therefore, she decided to throw me out of her house before I can cause much damage. That is how l ended up in the streets.

Thankfully, this is not always the case.

I sometimes thank God for having the family who supported me during the hard times, if it was not for them, I do not know what l would have done. And l thank God for giving me a strong woman as a mother, who always put me and my sister first, and that is what I am going to do for my daughter. - For the sake of my child, Saphia

Speaking out

Many women express their desire to help other women out of the situations they were once in, which is part of their reasons for wanting to participate in the *"I" Stories* project to share their stories



Photo: Cindy Dzanya

Gugu Mofokeng shares her story to make others aware.

with the world. Even before participating, a large number of these women had taken the first step to leaving the abusive situation and taking control of their lives. This courage is what makes the stories so compelling.

> Finally, I was able to take charge of my life and I am now single, strong and have regained my sense of worth .I am empowering other women out there. I am busy registering a shelter for abused women and children. I am unstoppable now. - Losing everything and finding myself, Gugu Mofokeng

> 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 house wife 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 believing in me. - Now I see the light, Lindiwe Ngoya*

> Today I am a proud poet, clinical counsellor and a house mother at POWA shelter for abused women. My advice to you is, love yourself, believe in yourself, trust God and have faith. I hope and believe that by reading my story you will be able to gain something and be able to share it with others. - Reclaiming my life, Maleshoane Motsiri

Change and reconciliation is sometimes possible

While the vast majority of the stories reflect changes that the writer made in their own lives, there are also instances where seeking and getting help led to the reconciliation of the couple.

> On the last day of the court appearance, he apologised for his behaviour and promised not to hurt me again. I chose to forgive because I believed him. I am glad to say that he has not beaten me since. - Demanding change, Grace Ayanda*

> My husband did not seem to consider my feelings or even that I am human, until I took a step to reconciliation with the police, S.A.P. who then handed us over to the Justice and Restoration Programme (JARP). They rebuilt my confidence, enabling me to empower myself... My appreciation goes out to those working with women for a job well done on my today improved marriage I am able to provide for my children and myself a safer and happier home. - Violence tears a family apart, Sandy*

Chapter three: *"I" Stories* in the media



South Africa's former deputy minister of Safety and Security (now Minister of Mines), Susan Shabangu, responds to media queries during a Take Back the Night march. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

The SADC Protocol calls on Member States to take measures to encourage media to play a constructive role in the eradication of gender based violence by adopting guidelines that ensure gender sensitive coverage. According to research conducted for the SADC Barometer, when it comes to coverage of gender violence, the media is more often part of the problem rather than of the solution. Yet the media has a huge potential role to play in changing attitudes, perceptions, and mindsets where gender violence is concerned. Coverage of gender violence has been monitored in regional and global studies; GL has also worked with GEMSA chapters to conduct periodic monitoring of the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign.



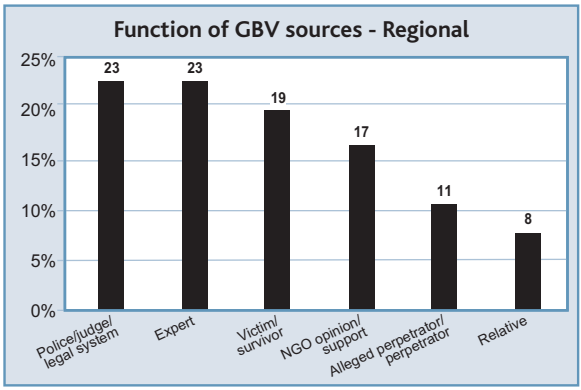
Key findings emerging from these studies are that:

- To the extent gender issues are covered, gender violence tends to get more coverage. In the GMBS, gender specific issues constituted 2% of all coverage, with GBV constituting half of this or 1% of the total. However, gender violence is often treated as relatively minor compared to other kinds of crime.
- Certain types of gender violence get much higher coverage, e.g. sexual assault.
- There is very little coverage of where those affected can get help.
- Experiences of women are often trivialised.
- There is very little coverage of those who protest against gender violence.
- The voices of those affected are not heard.
- Much of the source information is from the courts. This has a heavy male bias.
- Coverage is often insensitive, for example in the use of images, names etc that could lead to secondary victimisation.
- Women are often portrayed as victims rather than survivors.
- Women are often portrayed as temptress (asked for it to happen).
- Men are portrayed as being unable to control their sexual urges.
- There is a tendency to exonerate the perpetrators.
- There is a tendency to sensationalise.

Media not only reflects and reports on society, but also shapes public opinions and perceptions. Media calls attention to social issues and problems, and can serve to hold leaders accountable to citizens, reminding them of promises and taking them to task

when they fail to deliver. Exclusion from media takes on many forms - neglect from mainstream media as well as lack of skills and capacity for individuals, non-journalists from these communities, to engage with media. In the context of GBV, this exclusion means that the voices of those most affected women, and especially survivors of GBV, a rarely heard. As such, this important group loses their ability to influence and shape policies related to GBV, or hold their leaders accountable for their many promises related to preventing and responding to violence.

The graph from the regional GMPS shows that, across the region, the voices of the police, judiciary and other experts dominate in the coverage of GBV, each accounting for 23% of those who speak on the issue. The findings reflect the fact that victims and survivors (19%) now speak more than alleged perpetrators (11%). This means that the work of GL and other partners on advocacy and training around GBV is beginning to bear fruit. However, the findings suggest that there is still a long way to go in ensuring that the views of survivors are fore grounded in coverage of gender violence.



The *"I" Stories* have helped to fill gaps in existing coverage, and also showcase to media how personal accounts written by survivors themselves can be powerful for the media.

Media coverage and reaction

In 2007, the GL Service distributed 18 stories, resulting in 44 confirmed publications; in 2008, 23 stories with 43 confirmed publications across Southern Africa, representing a significant reach (this underestimates the real number of publications as we rely on media sources to inform us of use.)


Courage shines through the horrific stories as victims break their silence

Sixteen days of Activism on Gender Violence ...
Honouring my mother, sister

Speaking out against beatings

The power of the *"I" Stories* to evoke responses from people that are so much stronger than typical reportage is apparent. During the Sixteen

Days of Activism 2007, *Media 24* website in South Africa created a special section that highlighted the GL *"I" Stories*. The website has a function that allows readers to comment on what they read. One story which particularly captured attention was "I can not leave my abusive husband." Readers wrote to the website posting their comments about their own experiences of abuse, how they left abusive situations, and their frustrations at a society that continues to allow this to happen. Following are just a few examples of the 30 readers' responses:

> I have been there and at the age of 40 told him to go as I did not need the verbal as well as the physical abuse. There are jobs out there and people are willing to help.
>
> I've also gone through this kind of abuse, 5 broken noses, a fractured cheek bone, a fractured scull, 56 stitches on my head after being hit with a hammer, 30 stitches in my fingers after blocking a jab from a sword that was meant for my stomach. I know all about it, it's hard to leave an abusive relationship. Honestly speaking, I didn't leave him, the Lord intervened in His Devine way and my husband got sentenced to 134 years imprisonment for shooting 6 people of which 4 died in a bar fight. I've been abuse free for four years now after 8 years of hell. My message to abused women? Speak to a professional about your situation because if you are staying in such an abusive relationship it means that you cant think rational about it all anymore - you might be too damaged emotionally. There is help out there, it's up to you to accept it.
>
> You have nothing to fear but fear itself. His anger at you is a result of his being insecure and a coward. He can't take his frustration out on anyone else so he is using you. Leave him and when he tries to woo you back with empty promises, be wary of him and finally have faith in the almighty and hope for the best. You have to take the first step. My prayers and tears are with you.

This ability to prompt discussion is one of the most striking aspects of the *"I" Stories*. New trends in interactivity in the media, especially through the ability to comment online, are useful tools. However, as Thabani Mpofu, former editor of The Chronicle in Zimbabwe and currently a consultant at GL points out, readers also react to the stories in the traditional means open to readers.

> The *"I" Stories* bring a fresh dimension to media coverage as they are firsthand accounts. Readers can easily identify with the stories. They also bring out personal

experiences that prompt readers to send in related responses through more "I" stories, letters to the editor and opinion pieces. We sometimes get calls from sources alerting us of similar experiences happening within their community leading to media investigating the issue.

In some cases, the reaction to media stories is closer to home. After writing her *"I" Story* in 2007, Grace Maleka recounts how after her story aired on eTV she received several calls from community members saying she had lied. Written story in hand, she stood her ground and has gone on to give dozens of media interviews, especially with local community radio stations. The experience of participating in cyber dialogues, and having her story posted on Women 24 where it received many comments has opened her eyes to the potential power of IT in the campaign for women's rights. Not only has it empowered her, but after seeing the media reports, her mother-in-law, who accused her of lying about the abuse, asked for forgiveness.

> I swallowed my pride and forgave her and I learnt to forgive when people ask for forgiveness. When you do not forgive, you do not realise you are holding grudges. And in doing so, you feel like a prisoner. We feel hatred towards other people when freedom could be easily granted by forgiveness and we lose sight of who and what we are, because our hearts are so filled with anger. - Learning to forgive, Grace Maleka



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Grace Maleka was a speaker at the *"I" Stories* 2008 launch.

Raising awareness and providing information

The *"I" Stories* can be a valuable source of information. Maureen Shabonga, from Ikhaya Lethemba shelter in Braamfontein, bought twenty copies to give to staff and clients at the shelter, after a woman in her shelter who participated in the *"I" Stories* in 2007 had shown her the book.

According to Shabonga:

> Everybody who read it was amazed, surprised even shocked that this is all happening. The book is informative as well as powerful. Most of my clients don't know anything about the court procedures when they open a domestic violence case. They are often not informed about something like a protection order and end up going back to their husbands. A project like the *"I" Stories* can help my clients as they

can learn from procedures other women went through. They also realise they are not the only one in what they are experiencing. Some clients say it is better to live in the streets than in this shelter. Maybe staff do not always understand their clients and what they have been through or it is a lack of respect for human beings. Whoever reads the *"I" Stories* realises the severity of abuse and it will have the impact that we are more likely to act now to stop it. For this we need to involve men. Not all men are abusers. I believe it can help if men read the *"I" Stories*.

The power of positive images

While the stories are often deeply disturbing, they are over-whelmingly stories of courage and survival. The usual media coverage of GBV focuses on women as victims. To complement their stories, women who wish to use a photo to accompany are photographed in a way that shows them to be the survivors they are. These images are used to put face to the storyteller, and remind people that there are real women, just like themselves, their neighbours, mothers and sisters, who are facing this abuse. By using images that shows each women looking victorious we how the *"I" Stories* further re-inforce these women as survivors. We also include images of these women participating in various events, to show how active they are in the fight against GBV.



Survivors of Take back the night march, Johannesburg 2006. *Photo: Janine Moolman*

Role models

Many women recount that after their story appears in the media, or they are interviewed, they begin to be seen as role models in their communities. Martha Seloane, who stayed in an abusive relationship for more then 10 years, participated in the *"I" Stories* project in 2004. In 2004, Seloane filed a case against her husband in the Protea court. It was there that she got in contact with Nisaa, which had an office in the Protea court, and who offered her and her children a place to stay in their shelter. After Seloane's *"I" Story* was published, during the Sixteen Days of Activism, she appeared on radio and two television shows. When friends and colleagues told her they had seen her on TV, she would initially joke, saying "that wasn't me, but my sister." Soon women from her community would come to her house for help. Seloane recalls,

> They explained about their abusive relationships, and that they didn't know where to go for help. They also wanted to leave and tell their story on radio or television, but didn't know how to approach this. I would refer them to GL or Nisaa. Therefore I believe the *"I" Stories* are powerful because they open up the eyes of women who, before, did not always realise they were in an abusive relationship or did not know where to get help.

Maleshoane Motsiri's *"I" Story* of her abusive relationship was published in 2006. After the publication of her *"I" Story*, Motsiri gave a radio interview, after which listeners could phone in and ask questions. Motsiri recalls, "One man asked me why I had stayed in the relationship for so long. I didn't feel offended at all and explained how difficult it was to leave and that everyday I searched for a reason to stay, also for my children. He was sorry for me and was compassionate. Another man phoned in and said it was good we talked about it, because men also get a chance to learn and understand how abuse affects women. Other practical questions came from women, asking me how long I was in the relationship, how I got out etc." Motsiri has become a counsellor and role model, and she credits her ongoing involvement with the *"I" Stories* as helping her to be better at both.

After reading my own story I cried, especially after reading my own advice. I learned not to judge, to blame or to criticise other people's choices, beliefs, and decisions. I also had my beliefs that led me to the choices I made. Every time a client is telling me something, I explore options with them on advantages and disadvantages of staying. At the end of the day, it is their decision to make. And whether they choose to stay or leave, I will always support them."

Influencing media

Perhaps one of the greatest successes of the *"I" Stories* is that over the past few years media houses have started to look for their own personal stories, not always relying on the GL *"I" Stories*. The stories also influence the way media reports on gender violence; many use the stories as a launching point. Journalist Sandy McCowen of SABC News, started covering gender violence in 2003, and often used the *"I" Stories* as a guideline.

> The *"I" Stories* were awesome. I used them as a guideline and then did my own follow up. I asked GL to approach some of the participants to ask if they wanted to do an interview with me. One woman was HIV positive but hadn't told anyone at work. She decided on World Aids Day to tell all her colleagues in the entire company. She allowed us to film it and it became an absolutely amazing story. We filmed people's reaction to her explanation, how she handled it afterwards and how people were so shocked at first and then started supporting her. It started with her *"I" Story*, but we took it further and since then we did three follow ups with her. Another great story was about a man who had raped and who was repenting what he had done. In the ***"I" Stories*** book it was mostly about him and what he had done, but I interviewed him about how he had changed through rehabilitation and how he was trying to change men's minds and how men get involved in ending gender violence. My boss used to think I had the most awesome ideas, but in the meantime half of them came from the ***"I" Stories***. It was absolutely brilliant. I have won 6 awards in total; all were for my coverage on gender based violence.

Just like Seloane, who received visits from women in her community seeking help after she had appeared on television, McCowen's news items also lead to reactions from the public. According to McCowen, "I have had many women phone me at SABC over the years asking for help. After listening to their story, I would refer them to the right NGO's".

Nicole Johnston, former editor with the *Mail and Guardian*, believes the *"I" Stories* work for journalists because "they are about real people." Johnston recalls, "In 2006, we published the two stories of the lesbian women. I believed they were really good and interesting. Too often NGO's want to write about policy, while readers are interested in real stories. The trick is to write about policies, by mixing it into a real personal story."

Susan Smuts, Deputy Managing Editor of the *Sunday Times*, concurs.

> I found the *"I" Stories* to be a very powerful component of media coverage during the 16 Days. Journalists often focus on facts and generalisations and issues. This is obviously important because it contributes to our understanding of the society in which we live. But the *"I" Stories* provided the emotional punch that really wakes us up and makes us care. For me, this is because readers indentify with the human being telling the story. The stories provoke empathy, which is something a news report does not often aim to do. The fact that every situation is specific to the person, yet speaks to a much broader problem, helps to resensitise ourselves to problems that often seem intractable.

The stories can also have a positive impact on journalists themselves. Tanya Pampalone has used the *"I" Stories* as part of Sixteen Days supplements produced in the *Mail and Guardian*.

> It's always hard to figure out how to tell a story about, for example, rape in a way that gets people to read it. Somehow, hearing these women in their own voices gets to the matter and pulls you in. Perhaps it helps us understand those we go out to talk to in a way that reading another article with a few quotes just can't. If definitely brings you closer to those that we cover and perhaps makes us want to learn more.

Thabani Mpofu agrees:

> I think these stories have an influence on journalists especially when it comes to news sources. They encourage journalists to get stories from general members of the public as opposed to official sources.



Photo: Gender Links

Thabani Mpofu.

Loraine Tulleken, who has used *"I" Stories* as part of the Independent News Group's annual Sixteen Days supplement, thinks that reading the stories has a profound impact on journalists who encounter them.

> Although space restriction may limit publication, we read the lot. Besides being a great incentive to use our journalistic skills for the cause, they educate us, impact on our personal world view and often influence our approach to the subject during the remainder of the year.

Journalists as facilitators

In some cases, journalists with an interest in and understanding of GBV will assist writers in their countries to write *"I" Stories*. This process is very valuable as it ensures a diversity of voices from the region. One such journalist is Perpetual Sichikwenkwe in Zambia. Asked about how being involved in this project affected her own skills or approach to reporting GBV, she shared the following:

> To a large extent it has helped because, from the time I got involved in the project, I do not only look at GBV as one of the vices that happen but I also attach a personal feeling whenever I hear of a woman or man going through an ordeal. It has also helped, as whatever story I write, I always attach gender issues to see whether it affects women and men in the same way and I always endeavour to not only write the story but give advice or a solution to the affected person.

Men's voices missing

It should however be noted that not all editors find the *"I" Stories* to be a strong strategy for addressing gender violence. Moses Magadza, former editor of *The Southern Times*, based in Namibia, used the stories regularly during his editorship. However, he pointed out that some editors find the stories to be one-sided, and shy away from the single-source of the report. Some also feel that the stories promote or create the "victim syndrome," and give women the platform to "bash and blame men."

> My view is that the *"I" Stories* have given voice to often abused and unnoticed women, some of whom are barely literate. I think they have given people an insight into the plight of women and their struggles against the odds. The *"I" stories* have provided a rare perspective. That is both their value and undoing. They are terribly one-sided and give the false impression that gender news is all about women getting the sticky end of the deal in life. They largely ignore men who are also suffering. The men seldom get the right of reply.

Such feedback shows that in order to continue to gain coverage in the press, engage men in addressing violence, and provide a space for men to express how GBV has affected their lives, there is need to focus on some strategies to ensure that men are also participating in this project.

Moving into radio

For the past three years, GL has collaborated with CMFD Productions to record and produce spoken narrations by survivors of gender violence. The audio recording complements a print publication and distribution of these stories to media as part of Sixteen Days coverage.

In 2007, willing participants of the Johannesburg *"I" Story* workshop were invited to record their stories, for use by radio broadcasters. Each story was edited down to 2-3 minutes. As well, three "spots" were created. In one, each of the women repeat the excuses their partners gave for abuse, and ends with the tag line "No excuse for abuse". In another, each participant mentioned why they stayed in the situation, and in the third they recounted how the system treated them. The audio was confirmed as used by the following:

- Kaya FM
- Channel Africa
- Radio 2000
- Ukhozi FM
- Reposted on Amarc Sixteen Days Audio Resources
- McGill University Radio Station, Montreal Canada
- Reposted on Pambakuka.org
- Reposted on Kubatana.net



Information about the audio resources was also posted on a number of list-servs: creative-radio, Journalists for Human Rights, UNICEF"s Magic Media.

In 2008, the recorded *"I" Stories* were included on the Tjoon'in CD, a GL production in partnership with Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality and Gauteng Women in Transport, produced by CMFD Productions as part of the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign. The CD, which included *"I" Stories*, music, feature reports, and spots, was distributed primarily through the taxi associations to be played in taxis during 16 Days, but also made available for airplay. Several *"I" Story* participants worked with young journalists to make radio reports about GBV.

In 2009, the *Mail & Guardian Online* featured two audio "I" of these stories, with images, as part of their multi-media Sixteen Days coverage. This unique use of voice

Photo: Cindy Dzanya



Natasha Kangale making radio reports for Tjoon'in.

and images created a fresh and powerful way to further provide a space for survivors to speak out. Verashni Pillay was the online editor that worked with GL to create inspiring multi-media pieces.

I really valued them -- especially as multimedia products that were free and enhanced our coverage. They were authentic and very short, which is what I particularly liked. They brought different voices onto the site.

New perspectives on GBV

Overall, it is evident that there is a place for the real stories of gender violence to be heard. For those telling their stories, their courage is a very big step towards their own healing, and in creating a culture that says, "no more violence."

Chapter four: Healing through writing



Maleshoane Motsiri progressed from survivor to counsellor after telling her story.

Photo's: Colleen Lowe Morna

When GL, working closely with NGOs that offer counselling first started the "healing through writing project" in 2004, it was fraught with risks. What if women who came out to tell their stories especially through the media suffered even more violence at the hands of abusive partners? What would happen after the near celebrity status accorded by the Sixteen Days came to an end? How would we respond to expectations raised for jobs and security?

The stories of the 55 survivors that GL has worked with in South Africa, chronicled in four "butterfly" books, range from a woman who had her jail sentence lifted after murdering a sadistic partner following years of physical and emotional torture, to another who forced her to watch her husband having sex with his girlfriend in the same bed. This year we decided to follow up on past participants to see what effect speaking out has had on their lives. Some could not be traced, one had passed away and others preferred not to continue to be associated with gender violence related work.

"Writing the story was like a gift to me, because I knew people are going to read my story. I didn't do it anonymously because I wanted people to see me, to relate to me, for my community to see how tall and proud I am walking even though I wrote about my abuse and to see that even though it happens you will heal and can start all over again and be something in your life."



Maleshoane Motsiri.
Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

But the 25 who responded shared uplifting stories of what breaking out of the cocoon has meant for them. This chapter traces what has motivated women to speak out and what difference this has made to their lives.

Motivation for speaking out

Most of the women were motivated to speak out in order to help other women. One of them said that she decided to speak out because she felt that "most women do not seek help in time and harbour in their hearts the dreadful experiences." She was one of those women.

I now give advice to survivors of domestic and others forms of violence in my community because, what I would like most, is to have a good normal life like everyone else. I am telling a painful story that has shaped my life, helped me to heal and most importantly to move on. - When abuse can lead to disability, Germina Setshedi

I have dedicated my life to this work based on my principle of honouring my mother's experience, my sister's and myself, and as a man I will use my voice to bring change. - Honouring my mother and sister, Pascal Akimana

I decided to speak out about my story to help other women to know their rights and if there is an abuse problem to ask for help from organisations working with abused women and they will get help. - Demanding change, Grace Ayanda*



Photo: Tonya Graham

Natasha Kangale, healing anger.

All these years I have carried this secret with me, until recently I spoke to a very good friend of mine about what happened to me years back. He said that it was not my fault and he made me realise that I have to let go of the whole situation and move on with my life. One day he phoned me when I was at work and he asked me if I was ready to speak out and let other women know about my story. I agreed because I needed to move on and I was tired of living with that anger and hatred. He took me to the *"I" Stories* workshop speaking out on Gender Violence in Southern Africa. There I met great women and men, some who lived in abusive relationships and some are still living in abuse. - When a child is raped, Natasha Kangele

The power of telling your story

Participants at the 2009 weekend said that the workshop and experience of participating in the project is very empowering. For some who tell their story, their immediate and profound relief comes from having just voiced what happened to them in a supportive environment, among people who understand.

Today, I have found myself, after a long journey of looking for me. I have finally found myself and I now know that I do not need a man to define who I am. I love my daughter, I know now that God brought her into my life for a reason and only I can make myself happy and no one else. - Rape will not be my daughter's legacy!, Thandeka*

> GL helped me because before I was afraid to speak public about my situation (abuse). The moment I wrote my story, and heard other people's story, I felt healed. - Learning to forgive, Grace Maleka

Sweetness Gwabe, one of the participants in the 2007 *"I" Stories* workshop says:

> When I was participating in the workshops at GL and told my story for the first time to others, it was then that I realised how much I was hurt. I started breaking down and crying in front of others, something I had never done before. It all came out. The interesting part of it was that when I read my own story, I asked myself 'how did I manage to stand all this nonsense for so long.' It shocked me to read my own story, especially because I started feeling guilty towards my children. That I had allowed them to undergo all of this and didn't pull out of it long ago. At the time I stayed because I wanted my children to have a father, because I had never known mine, but after reading my own story I felt responsible for their suffering.

While Gwabe grew up in a well-off, loving family, her self-esteem was low by the time she finally, after years, left her abusive husband after another violent incident. Gwabe recalls, "While I was at the shelter I wrote a poem for a POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse) competition, and afterwards they asked me to participate in the *"I" Stories*. They explained to me what it was about and that the stories would be published. At the time, I was really afraid for my story to be published and therefore I did not use my own name. When someone constantly tells you that you are worth nothing, you believe it and you just want to hide away. I also feared that my husband would hit back and publish against me and spread lies about me, because I know how he is."

Participating in the *"I" Stories* project had a profound impact on her life.

> "It has changed me tremendously. I realise who I am, a woman of multiple talents. I became myself and not what I have been told I am: useless. I am now a role model to my children. I walk in front of them and am confident, because I know that children who grow up in an abusive home often lack confidence. The way I feel now, I wish I had not hidden my name."

Although Sweetness did not tell anyone of her *"I" Story* at the time of publication, she later bought copies of the book to give to friends and relatives, including her children.

> The thing with abuse is that you get used to it and think everything is right. Even when others criticised my husband, I would still defend him and say he is like this,

you will get used to him. I saw nothing wrong. Later he isolated me from my friends and family and locked me and the children in the house. My house became a prison. I want my friends and family to read my story and explanation.



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Grace Maleka standing her ground.

When I distribute the *"I" Stories* book to them, it is not necessarily about my story, because all stories are effective. I am empowering my daughter and other women not to repeat my mistakes. When you are with your spouse and you read these stories you will be able to pinpoint some mistakes to your spouse. It is vital that your spouse must know your likes and dislikes. You mustn't compromise. A yes must be a yes and no must be a no. That is another thing that kills us women, we keep on compromising. When they read these stories, women will be empowered.

When I read other stories, I compare them and think my story wasn't as bad as theirs. I cried reading the other stories, they are too brutal, and thought I would not have allowed that to happen to me. But I realise if others read mine, they might say the same. I keep on reading them, they never bore me.

Grace Maleka compares herself to a driver who looks in the right mirror, the left mirror, and the rear view mirror before overtaking a car on the highway. "When you have done all that, there is only one way to go and that is forward," she said. "For me, there is no turning back."

Confidence and support

As mentioned previously, abuse has profound and long-lasting emotional and psychological affects on women. Survivors of abuse often lack confidence and self-esteem resulting from the abuse. For many women, the *"I" Stories* gives them new found confidence as they find a safe space to tell their stories.

"I was scared to talk about my story, but now I can."
"It gave me the courage to face my fears."
"Being acknowledged by GL has built my ego and self-esteem."
"It was my first time writing about my life other than in my diary. But, damn, I was good."
"I was able to tell my story, which I could not tell, because it is embarrassing."
"I am not holding back anymore."
"I felt freedom, I am not scared anymore."
"That was a story I could hardly speak about without tearing, but now I just talk about it as if it was a history that does not hurt so much anymore."

When asked if the *"I" Story* process helped them to move on:

"I first forgave myself, then my in-laws."
"Since I participated in the *"I" Story*, I am more open and I can feel other people's story... but it also helped to move forward with my life and not let abuse for anything control me."
"Nothing is an obstacle to my progress anymore; I am marching on, despite my age."

Many said they gained unexpected support from family and friends:

"They appreciated that I can even write about my abuse."
"They see the matured change, integrity, and dignity in me."
"I am so proud that I am now a role model to my family, children, and community."
"They look up to me as their main strength."

At an initial *"I" Story* session in 2007, one of the women participants wore a long-sleeved jacket over a sleeveless blouse, despite the rising heat in the workshop room. When a facilitator commented, it came out that the scars on her arms embarrassed her and so, for many years, she was used to wearing long sleeves all the time. With encouragement from her peers, who told her she had nothing to be ashamed about; by the second workshop she was no longer so worried about the scars.

A similar scene repeated itself in 2008, when one of the participants said that the scars on her face were a constant reminder and a great source of her emotional trauma resulting form violence that happened years before. Again, by talking about this, by listening to fellow participant's words of wisdom and, by the end of the workshop, the women felt much better.

Standing up and taking action

In 2007, Etty Khoza told how an abusive neighbour violently chased her from her home in 2001 because she is disabled.

> He came to me and kicked me. I fell on the ground. While I was on the ground, he took my walking stick and hit me with it twice on my head. During this time, he was verbally abusing me and there was blood all over. I could not see where my walking stick was. I could not move and I needed someone to help me up. At that moment, a man came and helped me to get up. My mother said I should come home and my younger sister must go and stay at my house. That was in 2001.



Photo: Gender Links

Etty Khoza is back in her home.

Gaining courage from telling her story, at the 2009 follow-up workshop she had some good news.

> At the GL workshop, I met lots of women who had also been abused. Meeting with them made a big change in my life. Meeting with different people who speak different languages really motivated me. I asked myself, why am I doing this person who hurt me a favour by leaving my own house. I said to myself, let me prove to myself that I'm a human being, my life is mine. No matter what he can do or say, to hell with him - this house belongs to me.
>
> I went back to my house that I had left for so long. Since September last year until now I do as I please, so he can see that I do not care about him and I am not scared of him. The man who abused me sent a neighbour to come and ask for forgiveness and I asked the neighbour "What forgiveness? Why can't he come straight to me like he did last time when he came and hit me, insulted me saying I am a cripple?" I told her that he should face me himself.

For others, the workshop gave them the courage to take a stand in their own homes.

> 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. - Gladys Dlamini, Taking a Stand

Living positively

During the first 2008 *"I" Story* session, Blessing* tearfully told how she survived an abusive husband, but was now living with HIV and did not know how to tell her adult children. Returning two weeks later to share her written draft, she was ecstatic. Gaining courage from speaking out during the workshop, she went home and disclosed her status. They hugged her and gave her their loving support.

After the first *"I" Story* session, I felt a sense of release after speaking out for the first time about my status, and immediately began my process of healing. I got the courage to tell my children. I thank God for my children because when I told them, they did not cry. Instead, they said, "You will make it, it's not a death sentence, all we have to do is change our lifestyle and be positive. Together, as a family, there's nothing we can't beat, not even HIV can put us down." As I write my story, I feel good that my children have accepted my status. We eat healthy, exercise daily, think positive thoughts and give all glory to the Almighty. - Living positively with my children beside me, Blessings



Photo: Gender Links

Rose Thamae being interviewed at the "Soccer 2010: Voices of Youth" event at Let Us Grow.

Rose Thamae's three-generation story of enlisting her daughter and granddaughter to the cause after a gang rape that left her HIV positive has inspired hundreds here and abroad. She credits the *"I" Story* she wrote with helping to increase exposure and opportunities for Let Us Grow, the vibrant community-based HIV and AIDS care network she leads in Orange Farm with branches in Lesotho. Thamae has spoken on global stages from India to the United Nations (UN) in New York. Three years after writing her original story, her now 16-year old granddaughter Kgomotso says:

Even though I am sometimes stigmatised because of my grandmother's experiences, I would much rather have them out in the open than the subject of rumours and gossip. Mothers should be honest with their daughters. The truth will set you free.

Still changes

However, this is not to say that the workshop changes participant's lives magically. There are still individual challenges to deal with. However, another positive point is that women make connections with each other that can support them through difficult times. A year after writing her story and disclosing her status to her family, Blessing updated her fellow *"I" Story* writers as part of the follow-up workshops.

> After sharing my story with all of you for the 2009 catalogue, I truly believed I could take on the world. I soon discovered that I was very wrong. I quickly understood the meaning of depression. I went for one of my check ups and realised my CD4 counts had dropped. I was sure it was the end of my road I stopped looking after myself. I was not eating or talking to my family.
>
> My daughter noticed and she took my phone and went through it until she found one of the ladies l had spoken to about my status. She called her and told her what was going on with me and asked her for help. She gave her Mum Rose's number. Mum Rose is HIV positive and has known for many years. My daughter phoned Mum Rose and got us in contact; she helped me understand my new life, the meaning of healthy living. She told me what I should eat and how I should prepare my food. - Not easy but living positive, Blessing

Sweetness Gwebu, now an active gender activist says, "My journey has not ended. I am still fighting to go back to my house."



Photo: Gender Links

Gender activist, Sweetness Gwebu.

GL is also aware that those who choose to continue their engagement with the organisation are most likely those who experienced a positive affect on their lives. In at least one case during the polygamy focused *"I" Stories*, a woman experienced violence directly resulting from her story being read by family members. This prompted reflection on the possible harm that can result from speaking out.

Are the stories communicating for social change?

The Rockefeller Foundation's Communication and Social Change (CFSC) Network defines CFSC as a process of public and private dialogue and linkages through which people define who they are, what they want and how they can get it. Social change is positive change in people's lives - as they themselves define such change. It is a movement away from designing, testing and delivering messages to supporting dialogue and debate on the key issues of concern. It is about placing accurate information into dialogue and debate, focusing not on individual behaviours, but on social norms, policies, culture and a supportive environment. Perhaps most importantly, CFSC moves away from technical experts in 'outside' agencies dominating and guiding the process, and sees the people most affected by the issues of concern playing a central role.



Photo: Frank Windeck

Communication for social change in Malawi.

Organisations using communication as part of strategies for social change constantly struggle with how to measure their impact. While it is somewhat easy to monitor and evaluate the impact on individuals and media, as it is possible to access individuals and track, at least to a certain extent, media coverage, assessing impact on the wider society is difficult. For example, if an "*I*" *Story* is published in a newspaper such as the *Mail & Guardian* with a weekly readership of over 230,000 or *The Sowetan* with a daily readership of 1.54-million, how do we know how many readers have read the story, and if any of them change or took action as a result?

In order to help asses the impact of communication on social changes, The Rockefeller Foundation's Communication and Social Change Network created a set of indicators, or guiding principles. An analysis of the initiatives process against these indicators can help suggest how far a given activity my be affecting change. As it is in many ways very early to determine the extent to which the project will influence social norms, we can analyse the process against these principles. The following table reflects on what has been contained in this report, against these principles.

(excerpted from Evaluating Communication, Development and Change Programmes - What's Up?: Exploring the development of indicators derived from a social change and social movement perspective, From the work by The Rockefeller Foundation's Communication and Social Change Network).

CFSC Indicator	
CFSC Indicator 1 *Expanded public and private dialogue and debate*	We can see from the reaction to the stories on online news sites and the feedback from editors that the *"I" Stories* inspire dialogue and debate in the public sphere. We have also heard from *"I" Story* participants that their participation has catalysed debate in their homes and communities, with family and community members very often discussing the story, and their own experiences, with the writers.
CFSC Indicator 2 *Increased accuracy of the information that people share in the dialogue/debate*	There are a lot of misconceptions related to GBV, and the *"I" Stories* help to dispel these. They demonstrate the realities and complexities of such relationships, as well as challenges women face in accessing justice and services. They also help dispel traditionally held beliefs, such as that rape survivors are at fault, or that domestic violence is a private issue. By doing this, there is more accurate information available for discussions.
CFSC Indicator 3 *Supported the people centrally affected by an issue[s] voicing their perspective in the debate and dialogue*	Women and men affected by GBV are at the heart of the *"I" Stories* project, and it is their stories, in their words, that are the entire basis of the project. They are fully supported through the process by their peers and counsellors, and the editing team supports their writing process - however, it is they themselves that are the driving force behind the stories.
CFSC Indicator 4 *Increased leadership role by people disadvantaged by the issues of concern*	It is clear from participants' feedback that in many cases they become leaders in their communities. Several have gone on to become counsellors. Many have given media interviews for the first time. People in their community approach them for help, advice, and referrals. Many also become activists both during Sixteen Days and beyond.
CFSC Indicator 5 *Resonates with the major issues of interest to people's everyday interests*	It is clear form the pick-up by media and responses to the stories that they resonate with many people. For example, stories often prompt others to write in about their own experiences.
CFSC Indicator 6 *Linked people and groups with similar interests who might otherwise not be in contact*	This has happened in many ways. First of all, the need to support survivors with counselling during the process means that GL links up with other organisations. The process also links survivors of GBV with media, as well as to other NGOs who often request their presence at events.

This analysis would seem to suggest that the *"I" Stories* have a significant potential to contribute to positive social change, especially at the grassroots and in the media. By fostering dialogue and debate and working with those most affected to secure their position in this debate the stories can influence norms that perpetuate gender inequality and violence, while also resulting in those most affected taking a leadership role in

their communities, whereas before they largely were, or felt, excluded. The stories can also empower people through information, and challenge stereotypes. We have heard that these personal stories speak to wider issues in a unique way, and that communities and organisations have gained from each other through this process. All of this combines to challenge society's acceptance of GBV, and empower both writers and readers. In doing so, the stories are forces for change.

This report began with a discussion on exclusion and participation, and positioned the stories as a strategy for people affected by GBV to occupy spaces to speak out. It is clear that the *"I" Stories* provide a powerful approach to include those most affected by GBV to use their voices to inform and educate others, provoke discussion, and influence media. This is on top of the therapeutic benefits that self-expression can have for many people individually. While there are lessons to be learned and opportunities to strengthen the strategy, the current experience suggests that there is a need to both continue and expand opportunities for people to speak out, both through *"I" Stories* and other forms of personal narrative.

Chapter five: Where to from here?



Drumming up support for women's rights. *Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna*

The *"I" Stories* is one strategy among the several that must be adopted if the target of halving gender violence by 2015 is to be achieved. This last section of the report reflects on key strategies going forward; lessons learned and next steps.

How far? - Gender Violence Indicators Project

The extent of GBV in the country is still mostly unknown, and if we are to meet the target of halving GBV by 2015, there is a need to have something to measure against. The Gender Based Violence Indicators Project is an initiative for measuring the extent, effects and response to gender based violence in the SADC region. It is a means to achieve one of the set targets of the SADC Gender and Development Protocol, i.e. to reduce the current levels of gender violence by 50% by the year 2015.

The initiative is aimed at developing a set of indicators which can be collected on a 5-yearly basis and cascaded across the SADC region. Development of indicators has begun with stakeholder consultations within the countries that have been identified for piloting, namely, South Africa, Botswana and Mauritius, between January and October 2009. The consultation aimed to raise awareness and reach consensus on the need for the measurement of the countries' effort to end gender violence. All these countries had already developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to End Gender Violence which were similar but varied in context. One of the key outcomes from these discussions is the need for monitoring of the trends that were emerging in relation to behaviour and attitudes, as well as the progress made in the implementation of the NAPs.

Currently the project comprises of six methodologies, namely the Prevalence and Attitudes Survey, Qualitative Research, Administrative Data Analysis; the Burden of GBV on society, Political Discourse Analysis and Media Monitoring of GBV. These sub-projects are progressing in a staggered fashion. Two of these are in progress: analysis of data from the Media Monitoring of GBV across the SADC region is underway, while data collection in the Prevalence and Attitudes Survey began in South Africa (Gauteng Province) in April 2010. Household interviews are being conducted using PDAs (i.e., Personal Digital Assistants) amongst men and women over the age of 18 years. Plans for cascading the survey into Mauritius and Botswana are in place.

Knowing the true state of the problem will help government and gender activists to develop strategies and programmes for moving forward to make real change on the ground. The *"I" Stories* and similar processes can help to understanding GBV in the

country. While statistics are important, and we need to know the facts behind the problem, the voices and stories of those most affected can paint a very personal picture of this complex issue.



Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Walking towards a safer future.

Lessons learned

As with any initiative, there are lessons to be learned when one takes time to reflect on past experiences. The following are just a few of the lessons learned over the past 5 years:

- The stories are very popular in media, however, this still relies on active engagement with building relationships with editors, and being proactive about publishing the stories - for example being aware of deadlines for special supplements, and approaching editors early.

- Stories about surviving violence are intensely emotional, for the writer and all of those involved. Having counsellors on hand to prove on the spot counselling and referrals is a vital part of ensuring a safe space for participants. The whole editing team should also be adequately prepared to be able to support the survivors through this process, as well as cope with their own feelings.
- There is a need to go a step beyond "informed consent" when it comes to telling the *"I" Stories*, to ensure that writers fully understand the possible impact of telling their stories publically. GL's consent form is preceded by a session in which former participants share their experiences with the process, and people are encouraged to think about all the possibilities of using their names, images, etc.
- Involving more men in telling their stories - as survivors themselves, those affected by childhood violence in the home, reformed perpetrators, etc - will not only contribute to the diversity of voices (men's voices are rarely heard on GBV) but will also make the stories more relevant to a wider population. Stories written by men are likely to resonate with men, who are a key target group when it comes to changing attitudes.

Conclusion

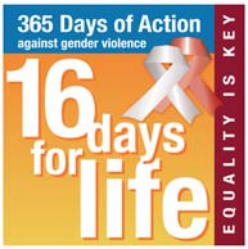
By continuing to publish the personal stories of those most affected by gender violence, we hope that it will not only empower the individual writer, but also contribute to raising awareness and creating dialogue. Many of these stories reflect the complex nature of gender violence, and how it relates to poverty, inequality, lack of access to education and resources, and of course the crucial link between HIV and violence. Although the stories are sad and often shocking, they also inspire hope. The overwhelming sentiment throughout each of the stories is the need to speak out.

Overall, it is evident that there is a place for the real stories of gender violence to be heard. For the women telling their stories, their courage is a very big step towards their own healing, and in creating a culture that says, "no more violence." Each of these stories represents thousands more. Writing their stories is a daring step forward for themselves and for other women. Maybe by reading stories like this, everyone, from our neighbours to our leaders, will see the real faces behind what gender activists are shouting out loud for - gender equality and an end to violence of all kinds.



What is the Sixteen Days of Activism?

The Sixteen Days of Activism campaign is the period between 25 November and 10 December when activists raise awareness around gender violence. The campaign began in Latin America in 1991. Since then it has grown in scope, bringing together civil society, governments, the private sector, Faith Based Organisations, communities and development partners to find lasting strategies for ending gender violence. In Southern Africa the Sixteen Day campaign has extended into a 365 Day Campaign to end gender violence through the adoption of multi-sector National Action Plans to End Gender Violence, in line with the 2006 call by the United Nations Secretary General.



Key issues in Southern Africa

- Nine of the SADC countries currently have legislation on domestic violence.
- Only seven SADC countries currently have specific legislation that relates to sexual offences.
- Only one country, South Africa, has specific provisions for Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).
- Six SADC countries have legislation to prevent human trafficking: Mauritius, Madagascar and Mozambique, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zambia.
- Ten SADC countries have some form of legislation to address sexual harassment.
- There is no legal aid for survivors of gender violence in at least five SADC countries; in all SADC countries NGOs carry the major burden of providing advisory services.
- No places of safety in four SADC countries; in all SADC countries these facilities have little or state support.
- There is now a concerted move to stretch Sixteen Day of Activism campaigns to year long campaigns to end violence that are better monitored and evaluated.
- Thanks to collaboration between civil society and governments, all SADC countries now have multi-sector action plans in place to end gender violence. Specific targets and indicators need to be strengthened. More resources and effort need to go towards prevention.
- The unreliable and sporadic data on the extent of all forms of GBV points to the need to escalate the pilot project for developing GBV indicators started in South Africa, Botswana and Mauritius.

Source: The 2010 Southern Africa Gender Protocol Progress Barometer

Gender Violence provisions in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development



Legal

- By 2015 enact and enforce legislation prohibiting all forms of gender based violence (GBV).
- Ensure that laws on GBV provide for the comprehensive testing, treatment and care of survivors of sexual offences.
- By 2010 review and reform criminal laws and procedures applicable to sexual offences.
- By 2015 enact and adopt specific legislative provisions to prevent human trafficking.

Sexual harassment

- By 2010 enact legislative provisions, and adopt and enforce policies, strategies and programmes which define and prohibit sexual harassment.

Services

- States shall provide accessible, affordable and specialised legal services, including legal aid, to survivors of GBV.
- States shall provide specialised facilities including places of shelter and safety.
- Integrated approaches.

Integrated approaches

- Draft National Action Plans to End Gender Based Violence.

Monitoring and evaluation

- By 2010 construct a composite index for measuring GBV.
- By 2010 provide baseline data on GBV.



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