



NO MORE: Gender based Violence and learner pregnancies in Namibia

[Survivor's Story] Title: The dark side behind my smile

I am looking at my watch and it is exactly 8H30 sharp. I have been dragging my feet to stand up from my chair to make a cup of coffee for myself. It is still a bit chilly after our city had received rainfall last night. The rain was a big surprise to everyone since we last had it in December. As I am trying to relax my mind at this moment, I had to rush the process of making my coffee before my visitor comes in. After a few minutes as I am sipping my creamy coffee, I hear a soft knock and I quickly put my cup on my desk and dashed towards the door to see who is there. Standing at the door is a tall slim middle-aged lady with a familiar face. I then quickly recognise Ndahafa.

Ndahafa was born in the Northern part of Namibia and went to school until she finished her primary level. Her mother vowed that she would work hard for her daughter to attain a university degree. Having the only child, she sends her to the big city, Windhoek to live with relatives and to continue with her education. Ndahafa grew up with the hope of becoming a medical doctor.

As I am welcoming Ndahafa, I remember the last time she was in our office. She came as a rape victim who was not looking forward to recovering from her ordeal. That time Ndahafa was living in bitterness, so severe that it changed her christian beliefs and started to behave in a retaliating manner, devoid of forgiveness and filled with bitterness, she started hating men for what had happened to her. As she tried to make herself as much comfortable as she can, she embraced herself and started talking. "First of all, before I get into my story, I would like to applaud and thank the entire Regain Trust team project for caring and giving helpless victims like myself hope again for a brighter tomorrow, says Ndahafa.

Ndahafa started to smile again and paused a bit. I could see the happiness through her eyes. She continued "Survivors Speak Up" article in the newspaper, this really touched my heart and played a tremendous role that positively encouraged me to get out of my shell and speak out and trust me, it was not easy at all, narrated Ndahafa. I quickly nodded my head in agreement with what she was saying.

"Growing up, I have always been a vibrant and an ambitious child, full of life with big dreams and strategic plans of accomplishing my goals. Never had I ever looked down on myself, or doubted my capabilities, until at the age of 16 years when I endured what I would call the most 'disgusting pain' of my life. To make a long story short, I once felt like my whole world shattered the night I was sexually assaulted by somebody I entrusted to protect me, sighed Ndahafa.

By then Ndahafa trusted to those who were close and knew her. She never thought anything bad might happen to her. This is a safe city with lovely people who can protect each other, she thought as she hurried out of the house. "It was a Friday evening around 22h00 when this certain guy from the location I knew, found me outside the house locking the gate. He approached me and we started having a normal



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conversation as usual. When it was time for him to leave, he asked me to escort him, but I had refused. Upon my refusal, he literally got hysterically aggressive, which I had found bizarre because I have never seen him in that state before. Just when I was about to walk away, he took out a knife and held it by my neck, demanding that I should follow him or else he would not hesitate to stab me. At this moment Ndahafa asked to drink a glass of water before continuing with her story.

“At that time I was aware that he had a history of alcohol and drug abuse, with previous offenses with the law, so in my mind I knew that he would not think twice about acting out his threat so I did not take it lightly. I was so frightened, and I could not even scream for help because that would put my life at risk. In fear of my life, he dragged me to follow him to a riverbed behind my house and that was when he forcefully undressed and raped me”, narrated Ndahafa.

The atmosphere of the room changed at this moment. There was silence and all one could hear was the breath of two women who were looking at each other without uttering a word. It was a minute of silence that changed into another conversation. Ndahafa asked me if she could continue with her story and I quickly responded with a positive nod. “After the assault at knife point, he suggested that we walk to his place, and I had no choice but to adhere to him. As we were walking, I managed to escape and ran on the other side of the road, screaming for my life whilst trying to stop any possible car to come to my rescue. He ran after me, but I fortunately had a taxi approaching my side before he could reach me. The taxi driver helped me to get home” explained Ndahafa.

At that moment Ndahafa asked if there are many people who have gone through what she experienced. I nodded yes in response and this helped her continue talking and vow to do much better to protect and help other women who are going through a similar ordeal. “Having been my first sexual encounter it took me time to actually process and understand what really happened to me. I however, decided to tell one of my relatives what exactly happened to me. She obviously told another person and the next thing I knew in a blink of an eye, the whole family knew about it. For some reason, at that point, I was so confused and uncomfortable with everybody, because I felt that what happened to me was quite embarrassing and shameful for it to be out there, said Ndahafa.

The following day Ndahafa went for a medical examination and went through the usual procedures required after a sexual assault. According to her she went through a helping process. “I was asked to open a criminal rape case against the perpetrator, but at that point I was emotionally and mentally traumatised. The only words that kept playing in my head, were that of the rapist threatening and reminding me. I thought about what he will do to me if I decide to open a case, that is if I do report, he will surely kill me. So once again out of fear for my life, I stubbornly refused to open that case, however I did not give anyone the reason motivating my decision, and this is something I regret to this day, narrated Ndahafa.



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After making such a drastic decision Ndahafa felt she was judged. People became suspicious and started questioning the truth behind her story. Ndahafa felt neglected because she thought people should have been by her side and support her. Regrettably, people started pointing fingers at her and doubted the fact that she was really raped. “What was more painful is the fact that even outsiders got to know about it. I found myself being judged and hearing all kinds of ridiculous versions of my story with a lot of mockery surrounding it. People said the most hurtful things like, I was not raped, and I went out to have sex now I was claiming to be raped in order to cover my shame. And this was another reason why I did not even have the courage to open a case more than ever”, mentioned Ndahafa

Ndahafa was emotionally drained and at that point she became very spiteful as she started developing intense hatred for her family. “Because these were the same group of people I trusted and expected them to fully reason and understand me. It got so worse and resulted in me being disgusted by the whole environment and everyone around me, I was filled with so much rage inside me. I literally wanted nothing to do with all of them” narrated Ndahafa.

After a period of living in denial Ndahafa started to think positively and understand that she needed help. Today Ndahafa can share her story, and continuing with her studies. It took a lot of courage for Ndahafa to seek help, but it was important for her that others know about the dark side behind her smile. Regain Trust is happy that there are people like Ndahafa who are out there to encourage other survivors to start a new life.

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Regain Trust empowers survivors of Gender Based Violence through psychological therapy sessions, one on one and group sessions. The intervention process helps and empowers survivors to open up and speak out about their experiences. Awareness campaigns are done through public dialogues, media campaigns and trainings. The organization advocates for a holistic approach to address GBV.

Regain Trust and (FES) Friedrich Ebert Stiftung with co-funding from the European Union are implementing a project that will contribute towards National efforts to address Gender based Violence and Learner Pregnancy in the Khomas, Erongo and Northern Regions. The project titled “Survivors Speak Up!” seeks to Increase and enhance the delivery of prevention, psychosocial, health, legal and protection services to reduce the prevalence of GBV & LP.

Find upcoming events and more information about Regain Trust on our website and Facebook Page.



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