



NO MORE: Gender based Violence and learner pregnancies in Namibia

[Survivor's Story] Title: Marriage is a covenant – Abuse is not

Time lapsed so quietly that I did not recognise the presence of Joanna when she arrived at the office. Wearing a colourful dress with her signatory hairstyle helped me to bring back the old memories of her visits. Joanna was born in the northern part of Namibia where culture plays a major role when raising a child. When Joanna was ten years old, she moved to Windhoek with her parents.

At the age of twenty-one Joanna was persuaded to get married. After she experienced what marriage really was, she decided not to have children immediately until she was able to independently care for them. “As a result of my decision I have been labelled selfish and sometimes these derogatory remarks would be said in a church setting. The irony is that fellow women, some in substandard marriages themselves have also resorted to calling me names for not choosing to have children within their time frames” narrated Joanna.

Joanna went through many struggles on a personal level and in her business. She was passionate about women empowerment and emancipation from co-dependency, which has proven to be the root of many social evils’ women have to endure daily. “Many are advised to keep their marriage issues silent for the sake of protecting the marriage and the testimony of the church. A lot of married women in the church are suffering from abuse in silence and pretend as if everything is fine which is tantamount to pride which the bible says will bring a man low”, narrated Joanna.

According to Joanna’s experience, most pastors have never gone through training to counsel people in their congregation, nor have they faced the same situations that their congregants face and hence have no clue how to navigate their way through counselling. “When you do eventually gain enough courage to take up the matter with the pastor of the church, you are not given the support you need to get through your abusive situation. The pastors do not support their congregants with the same professional counselling that is being offered by psychologists and psychiatrists. They try to use their own wisdom coupled with some bible verses to offer advice, but there is still an alarming rise in separation and divorce cases amongst born-again believers” narrated Joanna.

“I made decisions not to have children for now because of financial and emotional strain brought about by irresponsibility on the part of my spouse. From a nurturing perspective, I felt the need to ensure that there was always enough money in my bank account for him to use. I was manipulated into taking loans with the promise that they would be repaid, but I ended up scraping for finances to settle these loans myself. Money meant for paying important expenses would be redirected to other things without consensus” narrated Joanna.



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As an aspiring entrepreneur, I was required to travel for business purposes. However, this entailed engaging in long discussions to convince my husband, and I was prohibited from exchanging contact details with men while on business trips. On the other hand, my husband was charming at church and in public, calling me pet names, but an abuser at home. All the young girls in church would confide in him. He would tell me things like, “everyone including my boss tells me that I am sweet, and you are the only one who does not think I am. This and the fact that he was in church ministries that appealed to the human eye made it seem like I was the bad person” narrated Joanna.

Joanna discovered betrayal and further deception on the part of her husband. Experiencing this trauma set her life on a different course, both positively and negatively. At the core of the trauma was a mode of perplexity that set in as she tried to get around the shock. “I experienced temporary memory loss and episodes of depression at the time. On a positive note, I became fiercer and more determined to achieve my academic goals. Quitting was not an option and I could not afford to fail my modules as my financial situation deteriorated” narrated Joanna.

For the first time in her life, Joanna lacked confidence in her studies. She experienced anxiety and was always scared of failing her studies, but she refused to throw in the towel. She remained determined and focused, irrespective of the underlying challenges she faced daily. “Electricity was disconnected because of unpaid bills and I was using a torch to study. The money I made from my job at the time was mainly used to pay for my tuition fees. However, through hard work and perseverance I managed to clear the debts we were in and electricity to the house was reinstated” narrated Joanna. Women are being expected to contribute to the economy of a country with additional challenges added to the normal challenges of starting and establishing businesses. “For a long time, I felt oppressed, dismayed and helpless. Although it took courage, I stood my ground and persevered” said Joanna.

Joanna could however never have gotten through struggles without the support of her friends and family. Hence, her advice to victims of abuse out there is that they should never allow anyone to isolate them from the people who care for them as that is one of the strategies abusers use. “This was also the first sign of abuse in my case, but I fought it off and kept fighting it off over the years of my marriage. Contrary to the popular saying, “never expose your spouse’s weaknesses to your family and friends”, I dare you to speak up if your spouse is abusing you. Nothing makes the perpetrator stronger than a silent victim. Speaking about my situation helped tremendously. It helped me with the healing process, my friends and family helped me with food when there was no electricity and financially. My boss understood and was supportive when I endured depressive episodes and would literally offer me his office to work from. Above all, God has been very faithful to me in the midst of this ordeal” narrated Joanna.



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“The road to healing and reconciliation is long, however, complete reconciliation is not possible without my spouse seeking professional psychological help, with or without the church sanctioning it. I am not for the notion of divorce being the solution unless all remedies have been explored and proven to be ineffective. I still believe marriage is a covenant and the testimony of my parents being married for 47 years in 2020 and raising us as independent, responsible and honest children is an inspiration to me” said Joanna as she concludes the conversation.

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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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