



NO MORE: Gender based Violence and learner pregnancies in Namibia

[Survivor's Story] Title: Missing out on childhood

According to our time zone it is still early afternoon, and it is getting hotter day by day. After the spring, the weather changed to an appalling upward slope. The summer hit us so hard that we have lost faith to anticipate the coming of rain. Today we are having the final episode of Maria's story. I was eager to find out how Maria managed her journey, one so full of difficulties and challenges.

The father of Maria's child denied that he was responsible for the pregnancy. He insisted that they never had unprotected sex and that there was no way he could be the father. "He told me to go look for the father of my child elsewhere and that he never wants to hear me say he is the father of my child" said Maria. Maria could not believe what she was hearing. "This was the same person who knew before I did, that I was expecting his child, the same person who was against me getting an abortion" narrated Maria. Maria left her boyfriend's house broken, and those words he uttered continued to haunt her for the first few years of her child's life. "I grew bitter and was very resentful towards my child's father for a very long time. I had already made up my mind ; I was not going back to school to finish Grade 12. I was determined not to feel sorry for myself and the circumstances I found myself in. I made a bold decision and pushed myself to step up, find a job and take care of my child" narrated Maria.

At the age of 17 Maria had become one of Namibia's teenage pregnancy statistics. The stigma and judgment felt overwhelming, but she did not allow other people's thoughts or words, move or shake her. She had to grow a thick skin for the sake of her wellbeing and for the sake of her child.

"Over the first couple of years of my child's life, her father denied paternity and said I should not expect anything from him. With the help of my mother and close friends I managed to raise my daughter. My daughter started asking questions about her father for the first time, when she went to pre-school where she saw other kids with their fathers. When Maria's daughter was in Grade 1, she started communicating with the father of her child and he proposed that they go for a paternity test. Maria agreed and had her daughter ready for the appointment, but he never showed up for the paternity test. That was the last time they had any conversation regarding her daughter. "Over the early stages, I would have people approach me and tell me that they were informed by him that we have a child together. I unfortunately shot this down, because I said how can he admit to other people that we have a child together, but deny it in conversation with me" narrated Maria.



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Life became exceptionally hard for Maria when her mother passed. Her daughter was only 8 years old, “I had lost my strongest support system. Being the first born, I now had the responsibility of having to take care of my 2 siblings plus my daughter all by myself, but I persevered and remained persistent at being the best sister and mother I could be. Having the responsibility of raising my daughter and my siblings shaped me into the strong, bold and independent woman I am today.”

Over the past 21 years, Maria’s daughter has never officially met her father. She saw pictures of him and that is how she knows of him. Both Maria and her daughter have no ill feelings towards her father. “My daughter has made it clear that she still desires to have a relationship with her father, regardless of what happened in the past. She is ready to welcome him in her life if he wishes to be part of hers. I personally went through my healing process and I sincerely forgave him for the pain he caused me when he chose to deny paternity and my pregnancy. But so much damage has been done and my daughter suffered the most, she was at the receiving end of dealing with the consequences of the actions of myself and her father” narrated Maria.

Maria is fully aware of the trauma that she went through over the years, especially her teenage and adult life. According to Maria, it is so easy to fall into the peer pressure trap of wanting to fit in or try out experiences. Teenagers give in to social pressures without fully grasping that there is a price to pay for every foolish decision and act. “Being pregnant at 15 or 16 years is regarded as normal, society has accepted it as such. But it is wrong on so many levels because learner pregnancy robs you of so many things. Your mental, emotional, and psychological state is affected, and your life will never be the same. Through your adult life, you struggle and battle with your inner person because you were forced to grow up fast and before your time. For a child to bring another child into the world is one of the most tormenting experiences. Your support system can only be there for you so much, but the rest is completely up to you, most of the work you still need to go through by yourself. Not many are privileged enough to have successfully navigated through the process of making the best out of being a learner pregnancy survivor. Others are not as lucky. But the responsibility lies with each of us who have been through this, to share our story, regardless of how ugly and painful it is. By sharing our stories, we can help the next girl child from becoming another teenage pregnancy statistic. Through our stories, we can inspire and motivate the girl child who currently finds herself in the position of being a mother at such a young age, that there is hope even though the current circumstances might seem dark and gloomy. There is light at the end of the tunnel, but before you reach the light, you must go through the darkness, for every process serves a purpose” narrated Maria.



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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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