

Anecdotes on

# **EXPRESSING EXPERIENCES**

Perspectives on Gender Based Violence,  
HIV/AIDS, Teenage Pregnancy and  
Parent & Child Communication.

*Twenty short stories by secondary school students  
in Botswana.*

BOOK 2

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BOOK 2

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## FOREWORD

### **Anthology of Experiences of Gender Based Violence and the Link to HIV in Botswana: Told from the Perspectives of Adolescent Girls and Young Women**

This anthology of experiences of sexual, gender and other forms of violence among Adolescent Girls, 15 – 24 years in Botswana is derived from real life experiences collected across 10 Global Fund Districts in Botswana i.e. Kgalagadi North, Okavango, Ngamiland, Francistown, Tutume, Selebi-Phikwe, Kweneng West, Boteti, Palapye and Serowe Districts. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as depicted here encompass a broad range of harmful acts such as rape, incest, intergenerational sex and forced marriage. The Anthology is a collection of 40 stories packaged as Book 1 with 21 stories and Book 2 with 19, which BONELA (Botswana Network on Ethics Law and HIV/AIDS) and its partner Women Against Rape (WAR) with support from ACHAP, commissioned as part of the Global Fund TB/HIV Project.

With these books and in combination with other empirical national data on SGBV among Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW), we hope to propel national discourse on the same seeking opportunities for the effective integration and alignment of Gender and Sexual Violence to the National Strategic Framework on HIV/AIDS. We hope that this documentation, used appropriately as an advocacy tool, will also facilitate policy and legislative review within the justice, health and broader Botswana development context, which will result in reduced vulnerability especially of underage girls to HIV, teenage pregnancy, sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases.

This process of documenting these stories developed storytelling and writing skills of the 40 young, adolescent writers to reflect and tell the experiences of young people under 4 themes: 1. Gender Based Violence, 2. Teenage Pregnancy, 3. Parent and Child Communication on sexual health and sexuality, 4. HIV/AIDS and Treatment Adherence. The narrators bring out the underlying causes of sexual, gender and other forms of violence as well as the interconnectedness of these themes and how these can be addressed at individual, family, community and policy levels in the context of HIV.

Even though the reflections on experiences came from 10 districts in Botswana, they are not only unique to these districts. They also depict the experiences of many other girls across the country. In essence these are not just fictional stories, but rather a compilation of evidence that should direct us to re-prioritise interventions aimed at addressing GBV and HIV/AIDS among adolescent girls and young women to minimise their vulnerability.

Apart from the threat associated with HIV exposure, SGBV has long lasting effects on the mental and physical health of survivors. These implications, in addition to the stigma associated with survivors of sexual violence, often lead to economic hardships and the loss of a sense of community. Because many stories of sexual violence remain untold, it is hard to understand how far-reaching the impact can be.

I am honoured to present this set of books to Botswana and I would like to acknowledge the efforts of these remarkable young women. It is my sole desire that these stories will ignite a new way of thinking about adolescent programming and effectively respond to the relationship between HIV and violence as a Human Rights issue to support the national target to reach 90/90/90 by 2020.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW!

Most sincerely

Cindy Kelemi



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Executive Director  
BONELA  
November 2018

The following stories are works of fiction based on reality.  
Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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*I am a girl child  
Human, not a trophy  
Equal I am to the boy child  
He is my brother, nephew, uncle  
And I am his sister, niece, aunt.  
We are all woman born;  
Fathered by a man*

*I am able, I can, oh yes I can.  
Don't treat me as a trophy  
The predators might mistake me for their treasure  
Treat me as such-Equal to the boy child  
It will build me a security wall from my predators*

*Protect me from early marriages,  
defilement, rape, std's, sti's, HIV, rape, GBV  
And all sorts of abuse  
I am a girl child and not a trophy  
I am able, I can, oh yeah, I can  
As long as you treat me equal*

Poem by Naval Kathapelo John



# **DONATIONS ARE BLESSINGS**

**DIMPHO OITSILE**  
BOIKHUTSO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Selibe Phikwe District

Kutlo snapped the lights on, picked up her family photo album and sat on the edge of the bed. Maybe seeing images of the people she loved would make her feel better. She flipped through the album but instead of a feeling of relief, more sorrow washed over her. Her father had died from a short illness. Her mother and elder brother died in a tragic car accident. They had been a family of four – and now Kutlo was left alone. They had all sworn to take care of her, not just because she was the youngest, but because she was born with HIV. No one really explained to her why she was the only one in the family who had the virus. They all knew, and it was a well-guarded family secret. They feared social scorn and rejection against Kutlo.

She was a grown up woman now, taking good care of herself, never missing a single dose of her medication and keeping healthy. Kutlo worked in a bank and she could afford good, healthy food. She even went to a gym regularly. At twenty five, she was rapidly blooming into an irresistible beauty. But thoughts of her family constantly tormented her. How could the healthy die and leave behind one who needed their care? Death was mean and life just wasn't fair.

Kutlo believed in God. She believed that God was responsible for everything that happened, whether good or bad. She believed that everything happened for a reason. Although she didn't attend any church in particular, she watched daily church service programmes on television.

One morning as she was on her way to her office, she met a woman called Mona. "Hello Kutlo," Mona said. "I have been looking for you and I've been meaning to visit you." Kutlo was amazed because she and Mona didn't really know each other to the extent of one visiting the other. In fact, she had never before spoken to this woman, though she had known her from the neighbourhood.

"How can I help you? I'm kind of late for work right now," Kutlo said.

"It's important. Prophet Otsile wants to speak with you."

"Who is Prophet Otsile?" Kutlo asked.

“He’s a pastor at my church, Healing Mysteries Ministries. We call it HMM. He sent me last week to look for you, that he had a vision about you. But I was too busy,” Mona said.

“How does he know me?” Kutlo enquired.

“I don’t know,” responded Mona. “He’s a prophet, Kutlo. He knows, sees and hears. That’s his duty in this world; to reach out to those who need help.”

“I don’t need help,” Kutlo said.

“I didn’t mean you did. I meant, generally, he helps people. It’s worth a try, Kutlo. You have nothing to lose anyway.”

Somehow the sleek tongued Mona was able to convince her and that evening after work, Kutlo met Prophet Otsile at HMM church. She was surprised by the premises of the church – a small, makeshift tent that wasn’t even well pitched. Prophet Otsile was sitting next to his wife who was introduced to Kutlo as, “This is my queen.” They offered Kutlo juice or water but she declined.

Please tell me why you sent for me,” Kutlo said, abruptly.

“Of course,” the Prophet said and took a sip from a tall glass of orange juice. “You believe in God, right?” Kutlo nodded a yes. “Good. That is why I had the visions.” He took another sip, building tension.

“What visions?” Kutlo asked.

“God comes to me in visions. This time he showed me that you’re in pain; that even after so many years, you still mourn the death of your family; that you won’t let go. Holding on to painful memories is the devil’s work. Satan doesn’t want us to be happy. He wants us to mourn and cry every day. God wants us to progress. There is another lump inside of you; a burden that weighs you down and makes living tough for you. Kutlo, God has healed, in this church, through my hands, people infected with HIV, even those who were already struck by AIDS.” At this point, Kutlo’s heart

leaped. Did this man know her HIV status? How so? No one except her deceased family knew about it. It was easy for him to have known about the passing of her parents and brother. But Kutlo's HIV status had been a deeply guarded secret. "Through my hands, God is offering you a healing. That is why we're called Healing Mysteries Ministries. Even Mona has been cleared of the curse of HIV. HIV, Kutlo, is a curse. HIV is engineered by the devil. I am here to cleanse the world of HIV and if you believe in the Word, you too will be free of the virus soon."

Kutlo was lost for words. The prophet went on and on, referencing scriptures from the Bible and mentioning the name of Jesus way too often. Throughout his sermon, his wife never spoke a word. She just sat there next to him like a sculpture, not even shifting positions or crossing her legs.

"Meet me here tomorrow morning," the prophet said. "Bring your ARV pills, all of them. And bring your bank cards as well. God appreciates donations very much, Kutlo. Donations are blessings."

*Donations are blessings.* These words rang in Kutlo's head all night. The prophet had indeed convinced her. She had heard stories of people getting healed of all sorts of illnesses in churches. She had seen them confess on TV. Some screamed in joy when the diseases were cast out of them. *Out, in the name of Jesus!* Kutlo's spirit was lifted. Maybe this was her time. That night, she prayed for the first time in a long time.

In the morning, the prophet and his wife were waiting for her at the same spot, sitting exactly the same way as the previous day, a glass of orange juice in his one hand and a Bible in the other. It was like they had never moved. They started with a seemingly endless prayer. Then the prophet took the pills from Kutlo and threw them in a bucket of water. After they dissolved, he poured the water away.

"You won't need these anymore. Mankind has no idea how the power of God works. He manufactures useless drugs that ruin the beauty of God's works."

From a small bag, the prophet fished out a bank card swiping machine, the kind used by retailers for non-cash payment transactions. Kutlo was surprised by this.

“Make a donation to God and we’re ready to start the healing process,” the prophet said, giving Kutlo the machine. She hesitated at first, then took out her bank card and pressed the buttons. She wondered how much she should donate. She pressed P100, cancelled, pressed P200, cancelled again and settled for P150. She punched in her PIN code and pressed enter. Immediately, her cellphone reported the transaction.

“I just heard the voice of God,” the prophet announced. “You’ll have to come back after two hours. I need to pray for your bank card, the wonderful donation you just made. So leave it here. God has heard and felt your gesture.”

Exactly two hours later, Kutlo arrived at the place of the meeting. To her shock, the small tent was not there and she thought she must have been lost. But that was the place. There was no sign of the prophet and his wife. She turned around, searching the place with her eyes; nothing. Not even tracks on the ground. Just then, her cellphone chimed. One message received: *P5 000.00 withdrawn from your account. Amount remaining - P20.00.* Kutlo’s world spun around as reality hit hard.

“Noooooo!” she screamed. How did they get her PIN number? Of course, they must have done something to the machine to make it remember numbers.

She turned and rushed to the police station. It turned out that Prophet Otsile and his wife were fraudsters. There was no HMM church. Kutlo wasn’t the first victim. Mona was nowhere to be found when the police looked for her. *Donations are blessings.* Despite herself, Kutlo laughed out loud. Frustrated and shattered as she was, Kutlo swore with every fibre of her being that she was going to search for and find the cunning false prophet, one way or the other, sooner or later. He was going to pay for the humiliation he made her go through.



### Take-home message

*Stigma associated with being HIV positive may lead to vulnerability and manipulation by fraudulent individuals and institutions. Personal acceptance of being HIV positive is vital for lifelong adherence to ARV treatment.*



# ***NTSHA DITLHOGO***

PALESA MAPETE

DENJEBUYA JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

Tutume District



Normal circumstances would have made the faint, yellowish moonlight a beautiful sight, but under my circumstances, the moonlight outside was ugly. I looked up with teary eyes and asked God what wrong could I have done to deserve this. My head pounded as if a blacksmith was pounding in it with a hammer.

I tried hard not to think about it but memories of that dreadful day always found a way into my head, then into my heart and I would wait for that moment when my heart exploded.

The village of Tsamaya was widely dotted with acacia trees. It was about an hour's drive from Francistown, the second city of Botswana. Heavy smoke hung in the air, causing me to constantly cough and sneeze. I made my way to my uncle's place, passing through the shebeens and shacks that were spread across the village. I knew this village like I knew the palms of my hands. This was where I was born and bred. It felt safe in Tsamaya, or so I thought.

Upon arrival at my uncle's place, I did my everyday routine chores but this time something was different. That look. Uncle Thabo's look was different today. Weird even. As I was dusting the TV screen I heard him call. He was in his bedroom. I went in and he locked the door. He nodded towards the bed signalling me to go there. Confused, I obeyed and sat on the bed. "Shhh..." he said "It's alright. *O ntsba ditlbogo, s'ilogolo.*<sup>1</sup>" Slowly he undressed me, a peculiar smile on his face. I suddenly knew what Uncle Thabo was up to. My heart punched at my ribs. I couldn't imagine it. I couldn't let him do it.

But he did it. Uncle Thabo forcefully had sex with me. As he was doing it, I could feel his warm, humid breath on my neck. "Be a good girl and don't tell anyone about this."

Now here I was soaked in tears, a day after the incident, staring at the ugly moon outside. Not a soul knew about it. I heard my mother's door closing. She was going to bed. I hadn't told my mother about what her brother did to me. My mother didn't need to hear this. It would kill her. She was such

1 "You're giving your uncle a special gift, my niece, one I'm entitled to"

a sensitive woman. I bottled it up pretending that everything was okay. But nothing was!

In the next few months, I skipped my periods three times in a row. I felt nauseated most of the time and gained weight. Students at school were starting to make jokes about me, passing remarks meant to demean me. I wondered how my mother didn't see those plainly evident changes. I decided to go to the hospital.

The sharp smell of the pills and medicines cut through my nose, making me instantly gag. I had suddenly become very sensitive to smell. Could it be that I was pregnant? I joined the queue of people waiting for the doctor. When my turn came, I told the nurse that I hadn't had my period for months now, and that I was having these strange signs.

"Have you had sex?" the nurse asked.

"No I haven't," I lied. I remembered my uncle's words; 'be a good girl and don't tell anyone about this.'

The nurse handed me a little container into which I was instructed to urinate. In a couple of minutes, the results were out. I was three months pregnant. The thought of a life growing inside me scared me. Now I had to tell my mother.

At home I handed her the doctor's slip and told her. "Mom, it's Thabo. He raped me."

My mother didn't say a word. She was breathing hard.

"Mom, I'm three months pregnant. Uncle Thabo did it. He forced me!"

My mother remained quiet. That was what she did when she was angry. There were two things she seemed capable of; screaming out of control, or silence. She preferred the latter.

I headed to my room, leaving my mute mother there. She was stunned, I could see. She was literally shocked beyond words. That evening, we ate

dinner in silence. The food was tasteless. It was like I was eating cardboard. My mom kept looking at my big stomach. Then she said, “I’ve reported him to the police.”

Surprisingly, my mom supported me throughout the pregnancy period. She was there every step of the way. She held my hand and together we faced the challenges. I would study at home with my mother and laugh like nothing happened. This strengthened our relationship. I was really grateful for my mother. I loved her.

Labour pains caught up with me. The pain was unbearable. I felt like a set of needles were placed in my stomach and my back. “Breathe, my girl, breathe,” said my mother in encouragement. She had to be strong for me. I watched in admiration as my mother held her grandson. She was smiling. I could see she was somewhat proud. I made my way back to school and continued with my education.



Take-home message:

*Cases of sexual abuse must be reported to the authorities. Parents must be ready and willing to listen and support their children at all times. Being a teen mother should not stop one from continuing with formal education.*



# DO I STILL LOVE?

WHITNEY WAME LESOLE  
DUKWI JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Francistown District

Heavy tears flooded down my cheeks. I sat and thought for a moment how such a promising future in marriage could turn into absolute misery.

He made my life a living hell. Everything seemed bizarre as he had turned into a heartless and cold-blooded monster he never was before. “What was the real reason I was brought into this world?” I asked myself. I was living a life of misery, torture and felt trapped in between whether I was the main cause of the abuse or him. “Why was I turned into a punching bag?” I wondered, but couldn’t get an answer. I absorbed all the physical and verbal abuse he threw at me. I hid all my scars and bruises and endured all the pain. I did all these with the hope of protecting our new marriage.

Our marriage was fine until that day when I bumped into my childhood friend from the shops. We were so happy to have met each other after a long time. We talked about the things we used to do, reminiscing about the memories from yesteryears. I got carried away such that I didn’t realise that it was long past lunch time. I frantically ended the chat and rushed home.

When I got home I shouted, “Honey I am home!” as I usually did but my husband was cold and unresponsive. I suspected he was hungry and I hurriedly prepared him his best dish. We never shared a word even as I cooked. All my attempts at speaking were stonewalled. I had never seen him sulking that way before. Something, for certain, was wrong and I couldn’t help feeling jittery. When food was ready, I walked over to where he sat on the couch. I placed the tray of food on his lap, just the way he loved it. As soon as the tray touched him, he responded. Brandon slapped the tray into my face, sending the food and cutlery airborne. Luckily, I was hit only by the tray and not the hot food. While still shocked and in confusion, I felt Brandon’s slap across my cheeks. I hadn’t seen him get up. But now here he was, fuming and frothing with anger.

“Where have you been?” he shouted.

“I was with my friend. My childhood friend,” I said but Brandon wasn’t

convinced.

“Liar!” He screamed and punched me again. Then Brandon stormed outside, kicking the sofa on his way out. Our puppy whined in fright as he nearly stepped on it. I sat there crying with a bruised eye and a partially swollen face.

From that day onwards, things just got worse, as he became very strict about who I went out with. I couldn't easily go out with anyone. I had no life. I felt like a prisoner in my own home, like a dog on a leash, and I couldn't escape. Brandon sometimes held me against walls and furniture, but I still put up with it because I loved him. It got to a stage where I couldn't differentiate between truth and lie. No matter what truth I told, Brandon wouldn't believe me. At times I was tempted to tell a lie in order to save my skin.

Brandon took away my dignity and self-respect. My thoughts were scattered and not logical. I lived in fear for my life not knowing what his next move would be. Maybe it is true, love is blind, because I was blinded by my love for him and fear of losing a family.

Brandon called me a bitch and spat on me as and when he wanted. The abuse happened in private and I would wear my makeup to cover my scars and bruises whenever we went out. In public, Brandon treated me with 'love and respect' but at home he would throw me against walls repeatedly, punch me all over and throw me on the floor. This seemed to be a daily routine for Brandon. In many occasions, he would come from work fuming before he could start his abuse on me. My son Thabo would try to intervene but Brandon would push him away violently. I was so scared of what he could do to my son. We would run with my son and try to barricade ourselves in one of the rooms but he would break the door open. He would kick me mercilessly even though I was already bleeding from injuries.

One day he kicked me viciously such that he broke two of my ribs. I couldn't walk or talk. Brandon left me lying there motionless on the floor. Although at a tender age, my son was clever enough to call and alert my

sister Idah of my predicament. She responded quickly and came to my rescue. Brandon had walked away despite my cries for help. I was taken to the hospital and was admitted. Brandon was arrested, put behind bars and charged for abuse. I was in a critical condition. I stayed in the hospital for a month and during that time nobody had hope that I would make it out alive.

After I was discharged, I went to check on Brandon at prison. When I got there, he barked, “What are you doing here, is bringing me to prison not enough for you?” This caught me by surprise. I thought after a month in prison, Brandon had repented, but no, I was wrong! I immediately hit a hasty retreat.

On my way out, I started asking myself many questions. How did I get into all these? Why did I believe that this would ever work? How did I end up in these chains? It now dawned on me that I had judged the book by its cover for Brandon pretended to love and care for me when we first met. Did I still love Brandon? I wasn’t sure. I wasn’t even sure what love was, anymore.



#### Take-home message

*Violence in the home must be reported to the police for investigation and corrective action. Should violence prevail in the home, survivors are advised to seek counselling at the nearest social services or health facilities.*



# MY LAST DAYS

LONE DIKOLE

KGARI SECHELE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

Kweneng West District



The wind whirled outside. Like silhouettes of excited marionettes, tree shadows danced on the window pane. I kicked the blankets, jumped out of bed and hurried to the study table at the corner of the bedroom. Quickly I pulled out my diary and started scribbling *My last days*. I stopped and thought about it, wondering if I should continue writing. *My name is Atlegang Wadia*, I wrote. *I am sixteen...* Bang! Someone slammed the door outside and I heard footsteps approaching my bedroom. I jumped and slid my diary under the bed.

I lived with mom and uncle, though I hated this arrangement. Since my tenth birthday, life had been a field of thorns for me. I blamed my mother for it because when I told her what happened, she told me to keep quiet about it, that we couldn't send her own brother to jail. Even when my mother discovered that her brother gave me the disease, she didn't change her mind about reporting the rape of her daughter.

I took treatment fully, and ate healthy, following expert advice that I *Googled* almost every day. My friend Thata accepted me as I was. She was so warm and understanding when I told her about my ordeal. Constantly she reminded me to take my medication. Apart from my family, Thata was the only one who knew about my HIV status.

Thata and I proceeded to a senior school in Molepolole. Though we were not placed in the same class, our friendship soared. At the beginning of the third term, a new boy was transferred into our school and he instantly became popular, especially among the girls. His name was Emang. It was clear how Emang became a celebrity so fast. The boy was hot, I must admit. Every girl in school wanted to be his girlfriend but I didn't really pay much attention to him. For me, he was just another boy. I think my not paying attention to him attracted him to me. Emang lured me into a friendship and I made it clear to him that friendship, and nothing more, was how it would stay. But things changed. Thata, my best friend, started behaving strangely whenever she saw me with Emang. It was obvious that she liked him but every time I asked her, she denied it.

A few weeks later Thata started walking home without me, something she had never done since primary school. Then she ignored me when I

talked to her at school. I tried to think of what I could have done to her but nothing came to mind. But I knew that it was this Emang guy that had come between us. Although I had explained it several times to her that Emang and I were just friends, she never seemed to believe me.

It was over a week since I had last seen Emang, he wasn't coming around anymore and I wondered if I had lost two friends at one go. But I didn't care much about losing Emang's friendship. It was Thata's reactions towards me that hurt me the most. We had been friends since we were little girls. One day I went to her class with an intention of forcing words out of her. I wanted her to explain the ruthless behaviour she was displaying. When I stepped in, she scowled and asked; "*Go rileng wena?*"<sup>1</sup>

I grabbed her hand and asked her to walk out where we could talk in private. She pulled her hand away with so much force that I gaped. "*Tswaa mo go nna o tla ntsenya mogare!*"<sup>2</sup> she shouted for everyone to hear. The class laughed. I stood still, shocked. "And stay away from Emang. He's mine now!" The class thundered and a cold feeling spread across my body. I couldn't believe my ears. But my best friend wasn't done with me. She continued. "And for your information, Emang knows that you have AIDS. He won't be coming closer to you anymore, lest you breathe it into him." The class was having a lot of fun and I was burning inside.

"It's not AIDS, dump head, it's HIV," I tried to defend myself.

She scoffed and said, "What's the difference. You're going to die anyway!"

I sprinted outside, spilling tears and leaving a trail of hysterical laughter in Thata's classroom. She had betrayed me, yet I had trusted her with my life.

That night I decided to end my life. What use was it to live in a world where one didn't have friends, where mothers didn't care much about their daughter's feelings and uncles could rape their nieces and walk free? I badly wanted to die. That night I didn't sleep, I was thinking about the curse

1 "What's wrong with you?"

2 "Leave me alone you'll infect me with the virus!"

of HIV, thinking about Thata and Emang, students in my school and the community. I planned my death, wrote it step by step in my diary. None of them was going to see me. I guessed they were all going to be happy when I was dead. In the morning I took my diary and started writing my final words, just to say goodbye to the world.

*My last days.* I stopped and thought about it, wondering if I should continue writing. *My name is Atlegang Wadia,* I wrote. *I am sixteen...* Bang! Someone slammed the door outside and I heard footsteps approaching my bedroom. I jumped and slid my diary under the bed. My mother opened the door.

“Why aren’t you going to school? Can’t you see what time it is?” she asked.

“I don’t want school anymore!”

“Why?” mother asked. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” I said.

“Then go and take a bath now. I’ll drive you to school. Go!”

I didn’t know how my mother found my diary but when I came back from the bathroom, draped in a towel, she was sitting on my bed, reading my diary. I froze at the sight. Mom lifted her head from the book. She was crying. She looked at me for a long time, tears all over her face.

“I know,” she said. “I understand it all. You don’t have to do it, Atlegang. You’re stronger than that.”

“What, mom?”

“I read your whole diary. Come here.” She hugged me. “I’m sorry *ngwanaka*<sup>3</sup>. I should have been there for you through the trauma you’ve experienced. I’m sorry you had to go through all this alone. I promise you everything is going to be alright. Things will be normal again.”

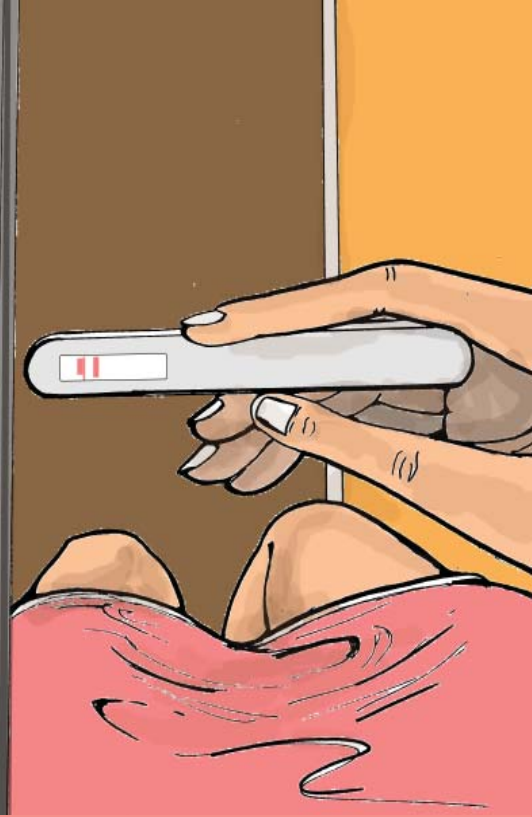
3 “My daughter”

The following day Uncle Tsheko was arrested. Mom took me for regular therapy sessions and I could see the goodness of life again. A few months later, Thata dropped out of school, pregnant. Emang dumped her and moved on with the next girl in the queue for him.



Take-home message:

*Discrimination should not be allowed in the classroom must be reported to the school authorities. Suicide is not an option to resolving problems. Parents should protect the welfare of their children above popular opinion.*



# RED LINES

SHIRLEY MODISE

LEHUTSHELO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

Kgalagadi North District

With her heart stuck in her throat, Opelo sneaked into the bathroom and locked the door. She could hear the muffled chatting of her parents in the living room. The churning in her stomach had begun; the nausea and the occasional dizziness. She sat on the toilet bowl and caught her breath. What if what her friend said was true? What if all these symptoms were genuine?

From her pocket she removed the tester and read the instructions again. Her hands shook. *When urinating on the stick, make sure to place the absorbent end of the stick into the urine stream and turn it so that the display window faces upwards.* Opelo ripped the testing stick from the wrapper. She heard her father's raspy voice in the living room and couldn't help thinking about how menacing that voice could turn when he became angry. If she turned out to be pregnant, her father would hang her.

She positioned the testing stick under her, inside the toilet bowl, took a deep breath and pushed a stream of urine over it. The instructions had said she should wait for 5 minutes. Opelo sat there with the pregnancy test stick in the toilet bowl. She feared to take it out. Tick-tock, the minutes went by. 5 minutes...8 minutes.

"Opelo!" her father called and she jumped from the toilet seat. "Where are you?"

Opelo looked at the results on the test stick: two, bold red lines. She gasped and collapsed on the toilet floor, unconscious.

"Opelo!"

They must have heard the crashing sound in the bathroom because her father came running. The bathroom door was locked. After a few moments of hesitation, suspecting something out of the ordinary, they kicked the door open. Opelo was taken to a hospital.

She woke up a few minutes later, unaware of where she was, but shortly realised that she was in a hospital bed. Her mother was sitting by the bedside.

"What happened to me?" she asked her mother.

“You must have fainted in the bathroom,” her mother said. “Were you sick?”

Opelo remembered the pregnancy test and the shock that hit her when she saw the results. “Yes, I had a heavy nausea.”

“Tell the truth. I saw the pregnancy test results. You have a lot of explaining to do,” said Opelo’s mother.

“Did dad see them?” Opelo asked, evidently scared.

“He did. He’s mad. That’s why he didn’t come here with me. You’re in trouble, little girl.”

Thinking about her father’s reaction, Opelo began to shiver. “I don’t know where to start, mom. I’m sorry.” Opelo’s tears spilled down. A few minutes later, she and her mother were on their way home, with Opelo’s heart beat quickening as they approached their house.

Dark clouds blackened the sky as they entered the yard. The car stopped and Opelo could already feel her father’s anger seething from inside the house. His mood was probably as dark as the menacing atmosphere out here. “Don’t expect me to defend you. You’ll have to face him alone. I’m equally disappointed in you,” her mother warned.

Inside the house, Opelo’s father was in the sitting room, a quart of larger shifting back and forth between the coffee table and his lips. Whenever her father drank from a quart, it meant there was something terrible bothering him. He usually drank small quantities – like all sophisticated men did. But now he drank like a lowly, and he was already inebriated.

“So you’ve been sleeping around, hey?” his voice was slurred and heavy, coming out in stinks of alcohol.

“No dad. I... I... Please,” Opelo stuttered. Her mother passed to the bedroom, not wanting to be a part of the storm that was brewing. Opelo saw a long *morethwa*<sup>1</sup> cane lying by his side and she knew she was going to get a whipping.

1 A native shrub from Botswana

“You know very well that I don’t tolerate waywardness, yet you decided to take the most disobedient route of them all!”

“Dad, I’m sorry,” Opelo cried. “I didn’t mean it. It’s a mistake.” She was standing in the middle of the room.

“Shut up!” he jumped from the seat. “I was going to wallop you with this stick. But I’ve changed my mind. You’re leaving.”

“Dad...”

“Take your clothes, your stuff, your everything, and leave my house. Go to wherever you can, do whatever you please. Here, in my house, there is law and order. Leave before I do anything you’ll regret.”

There was no way she could argue with him. Arguing with him was like throwing fuel to fire. She was mad that her mother had abandoned her; hadn’t stood by her side. She was a woman and she was supposed to understand women issues. Why had she hidden while her father was spitting fire on her?

At night, after Opelo had packed her stuff, she walked to Bra Jakes. The clouds that had gathered earlier cracked open and rain poured down. She reached Bra Jakes’ place drenched and cold. Bra Jakes was not happy to see Opelo. “What puts you here at this time of the night?” he asked without letting her in.

“I’m pregnant, Jakes,” she told him.

“So? Why are you telling me?”

“Because it’s your baby and my father just kicked me out. So I need a place to crash.”

“Sorry, I’ve got nothing to do with babies. I have a life to live. Please get away from here. I don’t want to see you again.”

Opelo couldn’t believe Bra Jakes’ words. He had promised her the stars, swore that he would always be with her no matter what. He had tricked her, used her. Opelo’s heart swelled. She had only one place to go. Light-



ening dazzled in the black sky and the rain licked her body with cold tears. She reached Maggie's house just before midnight. Maggie was Opelo's aunt.

"Opelo, what's wrong my dear? Are those tears or the rain?" Maggie asked with concern. "Come in, come in."

Opelo carried her bag inside, water dripping from her like she was a tree. She broke down and cried. Maggie hugged her and she narrated her miserable story. Maggie assured her that all would be well. She made her change into warm, dry clothes from her wardrobe and made her a warm meal.

Maggie promised her that things would be right. "Tomorrow I'll see a social worker about your situation. Your father has no right to throw you out. His foul emotions are not above the law. As for the stupid Bra Jakes, he has no idea who is coming for him. Trust me; he'll pay heavily for this. Now, go and sleep."

In bed, while listening to the rain on the roof above, Opelo's thoughts were in turmoil. What was she going to do with the child? How about school? Would her father ever accept her back? How about her friends, would they mock her? She was about to learn how to twist the bolts and nuts of life, for life surely was a spinning wheel.



Take-home message:

*Parents need to support each other and consult social services and health workers to address any challenges they may have with their children. Chasing children away is not an option and it is against the law. Children under the age of 18 should delay sexual debut to avoid the many challenges that come with sexual activity.*



# **THE DIARY**

**KELAME LENKOPANE**  
LEHUTUTU JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Kgalagadi North District

1 7 November 2014

Dear Diary. It's me again, your friend Pego. It's been a while, right? I always promise to see you the following day but somehow I fail to keep my promises. Diary, life is tricky at times. Do you remember the last time I told you about the passing away of my father? Well, I am left with my mother alone. My mother is a cleaner at the local health clinic. She doesn't earn much but is able to buy toiletry and food for us. There is no luxury in the house. We survive on basic needs – water, food, shelter and a few clothes. My dear diary, I don't know the taste of ice cream, I don't have the luxury of using public transport to school. I walk those many kilometres. By the way, I have just sat for my Primary School Leaving Examinations at Makgakgane here in Hukuntsi. I await the results. I hope to pass and maybe I'll lift my mother from these struggles. And when I pass, Diary, I'll buy an expensive pen for you. I don't like writing on you with these cheap and sometimes fading pens. Mmm.... what else can I tell you? Oh! My friend, Babui, remember we fought the other day and sulked at each other? Well, we are back together again. Let me go, darling, I hear my mother arriving. Ciao!

08 January 2015

Dear Diary, Happy New Year! Guess what? Primary School Leaving Examination results are out and I want to share this moment of ecstasy with you. I'm one of the top achievers at school! A series of A's with only one B! Isn't that incredible, Diary? I'll be walking into a higher level school soon. I'm excited but at the same time I'm not happy because at the end of last year, my mother was smacked with a dismissal letter from work – the dreaded retrenchment. She's planning on starting a small business, like making beads jewellery and selling them at the market. But I don't think my mother is really talented in making such crafts. I wish her well, because we still need food in the house. My mother is really a good woman and she doesn't deserve the retrenchment. Sometimes I wonder why bad things happen to good people. I'm getting emotional now, goodbye, Diary. Thanks for always being the shoulder on which I can cry.

21 March 2015

Dear Diary. I'm sorry I haven't seen you in over a month. Things have been tough on my side of life. I've started my junior secondary school education but, Diary, I can't concentrate on anything at school. My mother is in distress. The jewellery doesn't sell. Honestly I think they are not appealing enough. I once held a bracelet that she made. It scared the hell out of me. First I thought it was a talisman. Going into craft making without talent was a bad decision for mother. Now she's stressing and frustrated. We hardly eat anymore. She's thinking of selling fat cakes but she doesn't have money to buy flour and oil. She even asked me to find ways of bringing money to the house, to help her a little. There was desperation in my mother's voice as she said these words.

My friend Babui offered a solution. She told me that she and some of her friends did it sometimes when they were too broke. I've started standing in dark alleys at night, waiting for men in vehicles to fetch me and do things to me for money. They call it prostitution and societies deem it immoral. I don't care, Dear Diary, at least we can eat now. Big problem is that I sleep in class at school from the fatigue I endured during the many nights I'm out there. My grades have fallen but I promise you, once things stabilise a little, I'll get back to my old self and teach them a lesson at school. You know I'm smart, right?

Oops, it's almost time for business. Let me look for my tight, black mini skirt. It works miracles. See you soon, Diary, and wish me well.

12 April 2015

Dear Diary. I'm not the Pego people used to know. I don't even know myself anymore. I'm very moody these days. I frequently shout at my classmates and I'm rude to the teachers. A few days earlier I felt nauseous and the aroma from the kitchen pushed me to the bathroom to puke. I had missed my period. I fear going to the hospital because I have my own suspicions. If what I suspect is true, will I have another chance to continue with school? What about my dreams? What about my future? Will I ever get married and have a family of my own? Of course you don't have an-

swers! Sometimes I hate you for that! I hate you right now! You can't speak back or comfort me when I need reassurance. To hell with you Diary! I'm never coming back to you again!

23 April 2015

Dear Diary. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. Good night.

11 May 2015

Dear diary, thank you for forgiving me. You're such a sweet darling. How I wish I were you. You're only sheets of lined paper bound together and stashed in a secret place, only to be removed when troubling thoughts are to be scribbled on you. You don't have troubles yourself, but you allow me to transfer my day to day thoughts on your innocent pages, tainting the white of your surfaces with blobs of ink. Now listen, finally I went to the hospital. I am infected with the 'red pink poison'<sup>1</sup> virus. And that's not all. There is something growing inside me. It weighs me down and makes me feel heavy and dirty. They say I'll have to wait nine months for it to be withdrawn out of my body. Diary, I hurt inside, in my heart. I didn't tell anyone about the virus or the pregnancy. But the pregnancy will soon show and they'll start talking. As for the virus, it's a secret between you and I. Promise me you won't tell anyone. Goodnight, Diary. I'll see you tomorrow.

02 July 2015

Dear Diary. Today I dropped out of school. My tummy is growing big now. It was such an embarrassment as I walked out through the school gates. Everyone was looking at me with those drilling eyes. I don't know where my friend Babui is. My mother is very disappointed in me, I'm disappointed in me too, and you're probably also disappointed. I don't know who fathered this foetus in me and there's just no way of knowing. How will I explain it to the child? Why should I be bringing an infected child into life when I know that I won't live any longer myself? Thing is, Diary, I've made a decision. You'll never see me again. I'm exiting this life. It has always been thorns and hurdles all the way. But I'll leave you in a safe place

1 Slang used by teenagers to mean HIV.

where someone will see you. Whoever reads you, I hope they understand the state of my mind when I wrote this and appreciate the decisions I made. As for you, you'll get published one day, God willing. Who knows? Maybe whoever is reading you now is reading from a published book. I love you, Dear Diary. Goodbye.



Take-home message

*Poverty in the home can drive young girls into transactional sex. This can then lead to unplanned pregnancies and HIV infection. Community support is essential to avoid cases of suicide by young people in dire situations.*



# THE LAST STROKE

KEATLHOLETWE MOSENYI  
LETLHAKANE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Boteti District

Mr. Morekolodi Lesoso stood by the hospital window, lost in his thoughts. His unblinking eyes made him look lifeless, like the unseeing eyes of a mannequin. On the other side of the room, his wife, Tuelo, sat in one of the chairs in the doctor's office. She constantly checked her nails and fixed her Brazilian hair – signs that she was anxious and nervous.

“I have the results,” said the doctor, pulling them both from the depths of their reveries.

Mr. Lesoso had a rare medical condition called testicular torsion, a condition that involves the twisting of blood vessels that transport sperms. He was diagnosed with the disease in his early thirties, but he never had the money to pay for surgery. By the time he had the money, the surgery was unsuccessful. On this particular day, he had gone for fertility tests, hoping that maybe a miracle had happened. The doctor was about to give them the results of the tests.

“I'm sorry but you can never have babies, it is too late and very dangerous to perform a surgery now. It might cost you your life,” the doctor told Mr. Lesoso. “As for you Mrs. Lesoso, you need to help your husband. Be there for him, as this doesn't mean you can never build a family.” The doctor tried to give them hope.

They left the hospital and drove home in silence. Morekolodi could see that his wife wasn't happy about the results. She was, in fact, angry. Tuelo was like a bee – the kind that buzzed all day even about unimportant issues. Since Morekolodi was officially impotent, it was going to be a daily topic to rant about in the house. *Barren, stupid, worthless, a corpse, a mole.* These were some of the harsh words that would soon become Morekolodi's new names. Tuelo didn't see Morekolodi as her husband anymore. He suddenly was her puppet.

Tuelo slept with other men. She spent most of the nights out and sometimes she slept with these men in her matrimonial bed. If Morekolodi raised a complaint, he was the one at fault.

One evening, Morekolodi sat in the living room drinking a cup of coffee and lost in his thoughts, wondering about the future of his marriage, won-



dering why he had to suffer like that. He checked his watch and his heart sank. He knew that very soon, his wife would soon burst into the house. Just that moment, even as he was thinking of it, Tuelo pushed the door open and stormed into the house.

“Please sit,” Morekolodi said. “We need to talk.”

“I don’t talk to eunuchs. Father a child first and become a real man. Then you’ll earn the right to talk to me.” Tuelo’s heels clicked on the metal panels of the stairs as she ascended to their room. She sometimes threatened to reveal the secret of his infertility to the newspapers. Morekolodi was a respected and successful businessman in the country and ruining his good name was the last thing he wanted.

His bones started to poke his flesh. His cheeks sunk and revealed the jaw bones beneath. Clothes became too big for him. Tuelo disappeared from the house. Clearly, she couldn’t stand the sight of her husband. Morekolodi knew he had to become silent about her absence, lest she became mad and ruined his future. Morekolodi didn’t want to lose the things he had worked so hard for. But inside, the abuse he endured from his wife corroded him. He was emotionally and physically drained, yet he feared to seek professional help.

He had lots of money in the bank and men envied his wealth. No one knew that within the walls of his mansion, he was a subject of brutal abuse. His wife mashed him with fists, called him derogatory names, used his money recklessly and brought other men into the house. A pool of questions and thoughts filled his mind as he sat in his study room. With shoulders slumped in defeat, and tears glistening on his face, he thought of the only solution that may bring an end to his misery: death. Death would take the pains away.

The housekeeper budged in. Mr. Lesoso quickly wiped his tears and rushed to the balcony and looked outside. Red velvet roses sprouted in his view, brilliant under the morning sun. The perfectly manicured green turf spread across the yard like a huge carpet. There was a well-kept pond in which little, colourful species of fish jumped excitedly.

“I’m sorry to ask sir, but are you okay?” asked the housekeeper with a

concerned voice. Mr. Lesoso swallowed a lump and felt it get stuck in his throat, blocking words from coming out. He wanted to tell her. The house keeper had been working for him for decades now, and she had been a great listener who knew whenever things were not right in the house. Mr. Lesoso's pride overcame him.

"I'm okay," he said. "I guess I'm just tired and I have a terrible headache."

While still standing on the balcony, his wife's black Mercedes slid into the yard. The car stopped in the driveway and Tuelo stepped out. The passenger door opened and a strange man came out. Together they walked hand in hand into the house.

"I want you to meet my new husband," Tuelo said to Morekolodi as she led the other man in. Morekolodi's eyes bulged for he couldn't believe the words. "I want you to look after him, respect him, for he is far much better than you in many ways."

"Tuelo..." Morekolodi started and she interrupted.

"I'm pregnant with this man's child."

That was it. That was the last stroke that broke Morekolodi's tough spine. In silence, he walked to the study room, sat on his chair and pulled a gun from his drawer. He checked the bullets, and satisfied that they were enough for three people, he headed to the living room where his wife and her new man cuddled in the sofa. Each one of them took a bullet in the head. While the house helper came running and screaming, Morekolodi stuck the barrel of the gun into his mouth and pulled the trigger.



Take-home message:

*Men should speak out when they are abused. It is important for the society to recognize that there are various reasons why married people cannot have children. Fertility counselling for men and women is offered in the health service to understand these conditions.*



**NO  
FAITH  
IN FAITH**

ANGELINAH TSHUBANG  
MAKGADIKGADI JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Boteti District

The wide gates of heaven opened, releasing a downpour that threw pellets on Pretty's roof. Thunder shook small kitchen utensils, like the tremor effects of an earthquake. As the rain hammered on the roof, Pretty swore to herself that the life she lived shall never repeat, not even for the next generation. A tear rolled down her cheek as if to seal the new oath. Little did she know that the angry eyes of the devil were watching.

After doing remarkably well in her Primary School Leaving Examinations, Pretty progressed to a secondary school to continue with her education. Hard working as she was, secondary school academics were a walk in the park for her. She scooped prize after prize each term.

To most people's disappointment, including her parents and her teachers, Pretty's behaviour changed drastically during her final phase of secondary school. Those who knew her believed that this change was a result of Pretty's friendship with a girl called Faith. Faith was known for her rowdy behaviour and waywardness. She was one of those students who didn't care about education at all. It was a surprise that someone like her could befriend a focused student like Pretty. Teachers were shocked by this move. Pretty was called to the school head's office and requested to cease her friendship with Faith but all these efforts proved futile.

With Faith by her side, Pretty turned into a party animal. They frequented nightclubs and Pretty started dating boys. Her boyfriend was called Pako, a young man who worked in a construction company in the village. The relationship between Pretty and Pako was fuelled by Pretty's sudden lust for material possessions. Pako bought her clothes and shoes and also gave her pocket money enough for her to not eat from the school kitchen.

Then Pretty stopped going to school. She stayed with Pako, remaining home all day like a house wife. Needless to say, she fell pregnant. To her dismay, Pako denied the responsibility and kicked her out of the house.

She arrived at her mother's place just as darkness was beginning to take over from daylight. Her mother was having tea and home-baked bread for supper.

“Why are you crying, my daughter?” her mother asked. “Is something wrong?”

“I’m pregnant,” she announced, her eyes staring at the ground.

“That’s what disobedient children get as punishment! Didn’t I tell you to stop all your wrongdoings? How many times have I warned you about this?”

Even though her mother was very angry with her, she forgave her. A good mother would never disown her child. Her mother told her she should go back to school after the arrival of the baby. Pretty agreed with her mother.

A few months later, a baby girl named Bontle joined the family. With the assistance of her mother, Pretty went back to school. Having learnt from her mistakes, she resumed school with vigour and exerted all her might in her academics. She cut her friendship with Faith. She didn’t trust her anymore. Gone were the days when she believed so much in her. After learning the hard way, she no longer had faith in her friend Faith. Like her old self, she excelled in every subject, becoming, once again, the school’s favourite child. As for her family, they knew that soon, after Pretty had acquired a good job, they would move from a poor family to a wealthy one. They would be, her mother believed sincerely, the envy of every family in the village of Makgaba.



Take-home message:

*Negative peer pressure can derail students from their education. Parental guidance is vital for anyone starting intimate relationships. Unplanned pregnancies delay the*

*completion of school and perpetuate the cycle of poverty through generations.*



# ***S'KWEEJANE***

ANITA MORAEDI

MAUN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

Ngami District



Kitso's mother called her husband *s'kweejane* so frequently that it had now stuck on him like it was his name. This word was derogatory slang used by his mother to humiliate Kitso's father. When loosely translated, the word meant *a useless man*.

At three o'clock in the morning, Kitso sat in his room, his eyes bloodshot from crying all night. The door creaked open and in walked Ruth, his five-year-old sister. "They are fighting," Ruth said. Her lips trembled and Kitso knew she was on the verge of spilling tears again. "She's calling him names."

"Come here, sweetheart," Kitso said, opening his arms to embrace his little sister. He knew that in truth, they weren't fighting. A fight was a violent exchange of physical blows, or a verbal war. But in the case of their parents, his father was the recipient of the blows, never throwing back a punch or a word. That, technically, was not a fight. Kitso was only five years older than Ruth, but experience had taught him the responsibility of an adult. He cared so much for his sister and swore over and over that he would protect her by all costs.

Young as he was, it was Kitso who actually raised his sister. Their mother was busy with her business, always scolding their father because he didn't have a job. Mr. Tau sought refuge in drinking holes, spent his days there and came home very late and drunk. He would be called a *s'kweejane* but sometimes he seemed to not care.

"Father," Kitso said to Mr. Tau. "You're not a *s'kweejane*."

"It's okay, son. Your mother is right. I'm useless. She's the one who feeds you and your sister. She pays for your school fees. I'm a nothing. I'm exactly what she says I am."

"No, dad! You can't surrender to being called filthy names. Please do something. I don't want to end up like you! You're supposed to be my role model."

Those must have been the words that made Kitso's father run. He disappeared two days later. Even three years down the line, no one knew where he was. Kitso's mother never talked much about him. Whenever Kitso

asked, the answer was always the same.

“He was a good-for-nothing man. You’re better off without him.”

Years went by and Kitso grew into a teenager. Her mother never remarried, but she brought other men into the house. Kitso could tell that their lives were changing when his mother forgot his prize giving function at school. She had been given a formal invite by the school. The function was very important for Kitso because for the first time ever, he had won a prize. That afternoon after school on his way home, he carried the prize wrapped in brown gift paper. Home was the last place Kitso wanted to be. He missed his father, and often prayed that wherever he was, he remembered them. His mother once told them that the *s’kweejane* was dead. Kitso chose not to believe her. But then what if she was right?

Ruth was in higher primary school now. Through Kitso’s custodianship, she was able to nudge her way through her academic years. Somehow, their mother started drinking heavily and they became strangers to her. The businesses were not doing well anymore, and life was getting tougher for her and her children.

Kitso and Ruth were forced to drop out of school because they couldn’t afford school fees anymore. Their mother spent most of her days drinking or sleeping in the house. The siblings had given up. They blamed God for their misfortunes.

One morning a vehicle came to a stop outside their house and a man stepped out, approaching the front door. They didn’t recognize him until he was by the doorway.

“Dad!” they both screamed in joy. “You’re back!”

Mr. Tau hugged his children. Wherever he had been, Kitso could see, he was living well. He drove a sleek vehicle, looked very healthy and handsome, no sign of alcoholism whatsoever. Kitso and Ruth were overjoyed. He had remembered them.

“I’ve come for you,” he said to them, tears glistening in his eyes.

“Where have you been? How could you leave us to suffer like this?” asked Kitso.

“I had to leave, my son. You know very well how I suffered here. I had to go and reconstruct myself for your sake, so that I can take care of you and your sister. I needed the time away. Where is your mother?”

“Rob, is this you?” Kitso’s mother came from her room. She was haggard from a hangover. Her eyes were a burning red, swollen and puffy. She stank of beer. “You look amazing.”

“I’ve come for my children. I have a court order to take them away. They deserve better.”

“No. You can’t do that. What about me? You can’t leave me!”

“But I’m just a *s’kweejane*. Why would you need to go with a *s’kweejane*?”

“Look, Rob...” She belched, and a hiccup punctuated her sentence.

“Sorry, I’m sure you now know that what goes around comes around. Look who is the *s’kweejane* now. Kitso, Ruth, pack your stuff! We’re leaving to the city. Enough with this hellhole. I’ve already arranged school for you there.

Kitso and Ruth moved to the city with their father. They didn’t feel any remorse for their mother. In fact, they were happy that she got what she deserved. In time, they knew she would learn a lesson and hopefully become a better wife for her next husband.



Take-home message:

*Domestic violence has traumatic effects on survivors. Children who are neglected or*

*abused must be taken for counseling and the perpetrators responsible must face the law.*



# **STRENGTH OF A MOTHER**

ANGEL SEGO PHUTHE  
MOTSWASELE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Kweneng West District

I dragged my heavy feet, slumped on the chair by the window and stared blindly at the village outside. Except for the sunlight that bounced off corrugated iron roofs, the village looked dull. Like acid, my thoughts corroded my mind. I squinted, not sure whether it was from the hash spears of light outside or from the bile that etched my mind. I was thinking, again, about that old man who tormented my mind. I hoped I didn't meet him on the road again.

Mr. Mogami was one of the wealthiest and most respected men in the village. One day as I was walking home after school, he stopped his maroon Chevrolet next to me, opened the window and called out to me. I ignored him and diverted my route, taking a different path, a thinner one on which his big vehicle couldn't drive. Mr. Mogami stepped out of the vehicle and came after me. What did this man want? I wondered, getting frightened by his determination to reach me. I picked up my pace, half running. Oh my God, he came running. If I ran, I was going to create a spectacle. People in the street were going to stop and watch a little girl chased by a big man. They would cheer. I didn't want to be the news of the village, to be in the centre of controversy. So I stopped. Mr. Mogami braked by my side and nearly fell. He was already gaining speed, assuming that I would run faster. Now he breathed on my face like he had just run a marathon. His breath was a sour mixture of garlic and stale beer.

"How can I help you?" I almost added the word 'sir', just as I was taught to do when speaking to elders. But with this man, I decided to be rude.

"Chill, I just want to know your name," he said, a rueful smile on his lips. I rolled my eyes in disgust. He even used the word 'chill', so unbecoming to an old man like him.

"Why?" I asked, looking him directly in the eyes. I wanted to feign braveness.

He chuckled. "You are really uptight, hey," he said, using yet another word borrowed from a generation to which he didn't belong. "Well, goodbye." He went back to his vehicle. I stood there without saying a word, a little confused, I must admit. What mission did he accomplish? I wondered.

How could he run after me the way he did just to ask for my name and give up at my refusal to provide it? It didn't make sense. I suspected something, something I quite couldn't place my finger on. Even as a form three student in a junior school, I understood men's behaviour. We girls talked about such things. Mr. Mogami's behaviour on that day didn't add up.

The following day after school, I found him waiting at the gate and I knew instantly that he had come for me. It finally dawned on me that the previous day when he came running after me, he wanted to confirm which school I attended. Our school uniform was identical to the one of another primary school in the village, except for the tie. Mr. Mogami wanted to come closer to me to see the colour of my tie, and the logo printed on it. Had I been a primary school student, I'm sure Mr. Mogami would have pursued me still. Such a dog!

I walked past the Chevy, as though it didn't exist. He called me. I was surprised because he called me by my name, though I didn't tell it to him the previous day. "Come, get a ride. Let me take you home. I'm going there anyway," he shouted and I ignored him.

When I got home, I was shocked to see Mr. Mogami there. The Chevrolet was sparked outside. When he saw me approach, he stepped out with plastic bags of groceries in his hands. Just then, my mother arrived as well. Although my mother drank alcohol, she maintained her pride. She met Mr. Mogami by the gate.

"What puts you here, you rat!" my mother spat words at Mr. Mogami and I felt a sense of joy. I knew my mother when she was a little inebriated. She could spit obscenities by the truckload.

"Good evening, ma'am," Mr. Mogami said. "I brought you and your kids some food."

"Since when have you been 'the government that donates to the needy'?"  
*O thvaela batho, mxm! O beile bontsho o kare o ka bidiva gotwe 'Tonight'?"*

I couldn't help laughing. Mother had me right there. *Tonight*. What an apt

1            You have too much pride! Look at how dark you are!

name for him. Why didn't I think of it before?

“Please, woman, I'm just being...well, helpful,” he said, a note of discomfort in his voice.

“Get out of here before I send you to the hospital,” mother threatened. “We never said we needed your help. I know you're salivating for my daughter you dirty piece of garbage! *O tle o be o kgome ngwanake, ke tsile go go lobela dintse?* Get to the shebeen next door and you'll see women who suit you, you skunk!” When mother stooped to pick small rocks, Mr. Mogami knew it was time to flee.

The following day, there was no Mr. Mogami at the school gate. I didn't see him on the way either. I was very thankful for my mother. She was resolute and would do anything to protect me from predators. Later I learnt that Mr. Mogami had impregnated a young girl from the primary school. I wasn't surprised. But if only all the mothers were as strong as my mother, young girls wouldn't be subjects of abuse, rape and incest, as was the case with many girls in my village.



Take-home message:

*It is the duty of parents to protect their children from sexual abuse by ensuring their safety at all times. Young girls should be taught to be firm and assert their disapproval towards sexual advances from elderly men.*





# THE PRIEST'S SON

ANNASTACIA GABAITSIWE  
NATA SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Francistown District

My husband yanked me by my hair, pulled me off the seat and kicked me out through the door. “Get out!” he snarled. “How dare you cook and not dish for me? Who buys this food?” I stumbled outside, terrified. He stood by the doorway, his one hand planted on his hip, the other one shaking a threatening finger at me. Whatever happened to the oath we took, the priest’s words that bound us together?

Memories of the day I tied the knot with Maano are still vivid in my mind. We married after three years of courtship. Maano, the son of the priest of our church, was a giraffe of a man, taller than all the men in the village. His skin was as dark as coal and his teeth were as white as milk – especially when he smiled. And Maano knew how to smile. When we promised to love each other through thick and thin, I believed him. After the wedding, I moved with him to the mining town of Jwaneng, where he worked. We were inseparable, or so it seemed. We wined and dined together, toured the country and were seen together virtually all the time. Maano had a heart of gold and the humbleness of a sheep. In a few years, we were blessed with two children.

Then the table flipped, throwing away the affection and love we had all those years. The harmony started to wear thin and we began a life of cat and mouse. I didn’t want to believe that these were Maano’s true colours. Somehow, I believed that he would change back to his good self but his behaviour worsened by the day. He became an alcoholic, consuming spirits and beverages that were too concentrated with alcohol. Whenever Maano was drunk, his fists itched and my body became his punching bag. His abuse wasn’t just physical. It was also verbal – the most hurtful of all kinds of abuse. “You illiterate bag of rubbish! You’re just not my type. Were it not for my father, I wouldn’t have married you!” Maano’s words were daggers in my heart and scorching fire to my soul. Although most of the time I kept my cool, inside I burned like a blast furnace. Soon I found out that he was involved in numerous illicit sexual relationships. But I kept quiet and endured the pain like a good wife should. I kept the welts and the scars a secret. No one knew that under the mascara and the layers of foundation on my face were the marks of an abused woman. I never anticipated that my marriage would be so cold, so brutal.

Suddenly Maano started spending nights and sometimes weeks away and I

knew he was with his girlfriends – or whatever they were. His times away gave me a break from the beatings and the lashings but I'd lay in bed alone, my spirit corroded and my mood dampened. I lied to my friends that he was out on a work trip. But I suspected my friends knew, the way they looked at me. Even the neighbours must have known. Heck, the stones knew too!

The thing is, Maano was the sole breadwinner. He had a well-paying job and I really didn't need to work. So when he turned his back on us, the hammer of poverty gavelled down on us. I put the shame aside and decided to look for small jobs in people's houses, like doing their laundry, cleaning and babysitting their toddlers while my children were at school. I remained stoical in this baptism of fire because I knew that if I talked about my problems, I would be a laughing stock in my society. Back home, I had seen other women being unfairly discriminated just because they were divorced. These women were the village's spit bowls and should I speak out, I would become one of them – an outcast. Besides, our church didn't allow divorce. Divorce was considered a sin and always, the woman was to blame. The Eve was always the bad one. I also didn't want to disappoint my parents. They were proud of my marriage because I was their only child. And so I swallowed the bitter pill.

When the pill became too bitter to swallow, I approached Maano's mother and poured it all out to her. If only I had known! "*Molotsana ke wena!*"<sup>1</sup> she spat at me. "How can you say such things about my son? *O batla go re senya leina fa o bona o riana!*"<sup>2</sup> My son is a child of God and don't you go speaking badness about him, do you understand me?" Words dried in my mouth and my jaw dropped. How could somebody I trusted respond like that? I wondered. She was evidently taking sides with her son and not willing to investigate the matter. My mother in law. The elder of our church. Taking sides. I went back with my tail between my legs, thinking about the things she said. *My son is a child of God.* I snorted in disgust. The so-called Christian man I married was the opposite of what the bible preached. Such abomination.

"So you went to my mother and spoke all that nonsense?" Maano had

1 "You little witch!"

2 "You want to drag our name through the mud."

come home after he learned about my visit to his mother. “Who gave you the right? I paid *bogadi*<sup>3</sup> for you, and that makes you my item. I use you the way I want. I can do anything to you. Watch me right now!” His hands grabbed my neck and he pulled me up with such force that my breath was knocked out of me. My head connected with the television stand and smashed into the glass panels. The last thing I heard was the shattering of glass and then a blissful blackness.

I woke up in a white room, my head covered in bandages and drips connected in my body. The distinct smell of medicine told me I was in a hospital. A woman in a white coat approached me, the sound of her stiletto tapping the tiles as she walked towards my bed. She had a pad in her hands and a stethoscope hanging around her neck. I noticed a wedding ring on her finger. Her beautiful face and brilliant smile were signs that she enjoyed her marriage, that she received love from her man. We exchanged greetings and she started to examine me. She asked me about the injuries and that was the moment I *needed*, to tell someone. I poured it all out.

“It is the man who is supposed to be my husband. There is no peace for me, inside and outside. I receive punches and kicks and lashes whenever he’s home. He doesn’t provide for me and his children anymore. We go hungry for days, yet he wastes money with concubines and alcohol. My in-laws blame me for the abuse. And believe it or not, they say I’m the one who abuses their son! My husband promised to kill me without hesitation if I tell people about the things he does to me. He’s the priest’s son.” Tears gushed down my cheeks and I fell silent.

“I am so sorry to hear that,” the doctor said with a touching affection. “There is an organisation that protects people like you and fights for women’s rights. I have to make the call right now.” A week later, while my wounds and bruises were healing, I met people from WoMen Against Rape. Promptly, legal action was taken against Maano and the beast was finally revealed and thrown behind bars. That was it with the life of captivity for me. WoMen Against Rape helped me regain my dignity.



Take-home message:

*Intimate partner violence escalates over time and leaves the survivor traumatised. Violence in all its forms must never be condoned. Falling in love should lead to staying in love. Successful marriages depend on good communication and meeting each other's needs.*



# **JANET AND THE GANG**

ONKGOPOLE NDOBANO  
NGAMBAO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Okavango District

Mrs. Loago swore that she wouldn't give up. She believed that with time, things would change. At times she sat alone, reminiscing about the day she gave birth to her daughter. She never knew back then, that her child would choose not to listen to her. After all these years!

Janet was the first born in the family, followed by her two younger brothers who were both at primary school. The family was well known in the village of Shakawe for their good manners and beautiful conduct. Mrs. Loago taught her children to be disciplined and to have respect to all. Janet was always obedient to her mother, helping her with household chores. Already in a senior secondary school, Janet tried her best in her academics and was therefore one of the high performing students. Only a month was left before examinations.

It was Tuesday morning at school and everyone was happy, enjoying and having fun. Janet, who never had time to waste on fun, was busy in class, revising some topics when Bakang entered the room. Janet didn't see her as she was engrossed in her studies. "Hello Jenny," Bakang said and Janet looked up but didn't respond. Bakang was known in school to be a gangster. After a few moments, she responded.

"How are you, BK?" Janet asked.

Bakang left the room in silence, probably offended by the fact that Janet took long to respond to her.

After school, Janet started her way home. On arrival, she found her brothers and her mother preparing supper. Her mother, as usual, was singing sad hymns that always reminded her – and all of them – of her late husband.

A week later, after several signs in school that Bakang wanted to see her, Janet prepared herself, she knew that whatever Bakang wanted to do, she was ultimately going to do. Janet had to get ready to take the bull by the horns.

Bakang found her in her classroom, studying, as usual. She went up to her and whispered in her ear; "Let's meet by the gate after school."

“Why?” Janet asked.

“Meet me by the school gate at 4:30pm. You will see why. Don’t disappoint me,” Bakang whispered and stepped back, then walked out of Janet’s classroom.

*Don’t disappoint me.* Who on earth did Bakang think she was? Janet boiled inside. If this was going to be a fight, she thought, then let it be. She was going to face her!

When the school-is-out bell rang, Janet had already packed her books. She jumped and hurried outside, heading for the gate. Her classmates were surprised. Janet was usually the last to leave the room because she would always remain in class studying.

At the gate, no student had exited yet. They probably were still putting books in lockers or saying goodbye to their friends. She waited at the gate. Five minutes later, Bakang and a group of girls walked her way.

“You’re late,” Janet scolded her, trying to set the pace. She was determined not to let Bakang do as she pleased with her. “Why do you want to see me?”

“We’d like you to join our crew,” Bakang said, her face pulled in an expression that told Janet that this was not a request but rather an instruction. For a moment, Janet considered this.

“This is it?” Janet laughed a little, albeit mirthlessly. “Is this why you wanted to see me? You want me to be a part of your gang?”

“Yes,” Bakang said. The other girls stood behind her like a wall of soldiers protecting the general.

“Why?” Janet demanded to know.

“You don’t ask questions when opportunities like this one present themselves,” said Bakang. “Think about it overnight. And remember, I never accept a rejection.” With that, the girls marched back into the school yard,



leaving Janet standing there in the heat.

“What an arrogant fool!” Janet cursed long after they had gone.

That night she considered Bakang’s proposal. She knew Bakang and her girls were bad, but she also knew that if she rejected them, they would make her life in school miserable. She wouldn’t be able to focus in school anymore. Maybe she could join them, and become a passive member who didn’t indulge in much of their mischievous deeds.

Three weeks later, Janet was neck-deep in the deeds of the gang. Surprisingly to her, she found it exciting, enthralling, and not like anything she had done before. Waywardness was fun!

Her performance in academics dropped drastically. One day Bakang brought a boy to Janet. “This here is your boyfriend,” Bakang announced to her.

“What? I never said I wanted a boyfriend,” Janet objected.

“I know. But you do. We all have boyfriends and you kinda-like don’t fit in without one. Besides, who really doesn’t want a boyfriend?” Bakang held the boy’s hand. “This boy will treat you super good. He’s amazing, plus, he’s from a rich family.”

Before long, the ‘super good, amazing, from-a-rich-family’ boy got Janet pregnant. His name was James, and he refused to have anything to do with the pregnancy. James’ rejection shocked Janet. Rumour had it that James was on a mission to impregnate her. Her crew had conspired against her and brought James precisely to do what he did. What was she going to do? Should she abort? Should she go on and have a fatherless baby? Who was going to take care of the baby? What about her family? She had disappointed them.

While she packed her things and left the school with a swelling stomach, Bakang and her crew remained in school. They had long abandoned her. She could sense them laughing at her. The whole school was laughing. Even the trees and the stones were laughing at her.



Take-home message:

*Negative peer pressure and bullying are unacceptable in schools and must be addressed through enforcement of school safety policies. It is essential to visit a health care provider within three days of engaging in unprotected sex so that emergency contraceptives (EC) and HIV post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) can be administered.*



# **ABANDONING WAME**

**DINEO LEKGOANE**  
NGAMI JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Ngami District

“I’m sorry, you can’t conceive.” Tears blurred my vision as the doctor’s words played through my mind. My husband of five years, Mmoloki, had served me with divorce papers that morning before going to work. After five years of trying for a baby we had both undergone some tests and the doctor said I was the one with the problem. He had explained but I couldn’t understand the medical jargon. All I heard was that the problem had resulted from a complication of the operation I had twenty years ago while giving birth. Tears of sorrow rolled down my cheeks as I remembered the mistakes I committed twenty years ago. I knew God was punishing me for abandoning Wame.

Twenty years ago my friend Boitumelo and I had gone to our friend Nanjira’s fourteenth birthday party. Her mother had thrown a huge celebration for her. At the party, Boitumelo had introduced me to Moraedi.

“He’s filthy rich,” Boitumelo had whispered into my ear and with a wink and a wave, she had left on the arm of Ray, Moraedi’s friend.

“How old are you?” Moraedi had asked, his breath hot on my face. He reeked of alcohol. I stiffened involuntarily and moved back two steps. I then remembered the school tour and how much I wanted to go on that tour. My parents were too poor to contribute the five hundred pula that was needed for the tour. Here was a way out! If he was indeed rich, then Moraedi was the ticket to that trip. Now, if I played my cards well, Moraedi would definitely provide the money for the tour. He moved forward to close the distance between us and this time I didn’t move back.

“Eighteen,” I lied.

He smiled. He knew that I was lying. I stood my ground as he moved closer to me.

“This party is very boring. Don’t you want us to go to my place for some proper entertainment?” he asked into my face. I knew what he wanted from me. Though I had never done it before, I could see it on his face – the lust glowing in his eyes. He was looking weirdly at me. I hesitated. He removed his wallet from his coat pocket and opened it, revealing a stack

of tightly packed two hundred pula notes.

“Okay,” I said hesitantly. I knew that I was putting my life in danger. A small voice in my head, an intuition of some sort, warned me against him but I shushed it instantly. Instinct told me to resist but I thought no. He wrapped his arm around my tiny waist and led me to his car. We rode in silence and that warning feeling was still there – a flashing red light deep within my core that made me want to jump from the speeding car. My heart hammered relentlessly against my ribs and I shivered. Moraedi turned and smiled sweetly at me. It was as if he could sense the panic in me.

When we arrived at his house, he opened a bottle of wine and filled two glasses. He handed me one of the glasses.

“I’m sorry, I don’t take alcohol,” I said in a quivering voice.

“Oh please, spare me the whining and drink it in one gulp.” His voice had shed its softness. I looked at his angry face and started crying.

“I want to go home,” I sobbed.

“Okay.” With that he grabbed my wrist and pulled me towards the bedroom. He threw me on the bed and ripped off my dress. He then pulled off my panties and I sank my nails into his chest, clawing desperately to make him stop. My resistance irritated him and fuelled the animal in him. He roughly parted my legs and forced himself in me. I cried at the sharp pain that followed. After he was done, he rolled off me, smiled with a smirk and fell asleep. I slipped into my panties, rearranged my torn dress, emptied his wallet and limped off home.

I couldn’t enjoy the tour as I kept remembering that fateful night. I felt very embarrassed and whenever my schoolmates and teachers looked at me, I felt like they knew what had happened to me. Unfortunately, after two months, I learnt I was pregnant. I dropped out of school and seven months later, I gave birth to a two kilogram baby, barely missing being labelled premature.

The baby's cries were ear wrecking. Wame, as the baby was named by my mother at the hospital, cried every waking hour of her life. A baby myself, I felt overwhelmed by her cries. I was only fourteen years old when I gave birth to her. A week later, I was tired of her cries and I made a decision there and then. I knew that that was the best thing to do, especially for the baby. Wame, meaning 'mine' was never going to live up to her name. I looked at the tiny bundle and I felt pity for the small thing. I felt sorry for myself too; for the nine difficult months I had carried her. That night, before I could change my mind, I packed her few belongings and left her at Lesedi Orphanage, then disappeared into the darkness.

Looking back now, I knew that I was being punished for my sins twenty years back, for that choice I made; the decision to abandon Wame. I didn't blame my husband for asking me for the divorce. I too wouldn't want to be tied down to someone who was barren. I wiped my tears, signed the divorce papers, packed a few clothes and headed to Lesedi Orphanage. Maybe they would help me locate Wame and if I asked for forgiveness from her, my conscience would be unburdened.

#### Take-home message:

*Parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children know and understand their family financial circumstances and status. Children should learn to live within the means of their family and develop themselves to be able to provide for their future needs and wants.*



# FREE AT LAST

TIROYAONE SERAME  
NGAMI JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Ngami District

For six months I wore black clothes – a sign of mourning for my late husband. Some people refused to wear the clothes for six months as society dictated, and wore them for three months only instead. I wore them for the six months term without complaint. “Andile really loved her husband. Look at how long she’s grieving.” I would hear people say behind my back and I would smile secretly. If only they knew...

I remember the day I attained my freedom as vividly as if it had happened yesterday. After living with my abusive husband for seven years, what happened to my husband that warm Saturday three years ago was indeed a blessing in disguise. That Saturday, I was busy in the kitchen when he called out to me.

“Andile, Andile! Where are you?” knowing that he wouldn’t listen to anything from me, I left the pot uncovered and the porridge simmering and went to answer to my master’s call. To my husband, I was a servant and a punching bag, not a wife.

“What have you been doing all day that you pretend to be busy by the time I need you? Don’t you know your duties even by this time?” I felt a sharp pain searing across my chest at his words. I knew what he wanted, so I went straight into the bedroom, stripped off my clothes and lay obediently on the bed. I closed my eyes as I felt his rough hands touch my body. Tears silently streamed down my cheeks as he helped himself on me, not caring about how I felt. At last, like the creature he was, he grunted, sated, and then rolled off me. The following day I visited my grandmother and told her my ordeal.

“There’s no rape in marriage, Andile. We told you on the day of your marriage that your husband owns you. Don’t disgrace us, please. He has a right



to sleep with you for you to bear us a son who will carry on our family name. Wipe those tears and go back to your husband, Andile.”

Hopelessly I went back to my husband with a heavy heart. As I approached home, Glory, our daughter, rushed towards me. She was five years old with round eyes and an angelic face. People said she resembled me but every time I looked in the mirror, all I saw was an old hag with a pitiful face. I knew that my husband no longer loved me and remaining married to him was a nightmare. Glory was the only good thing that had come out of my marriage. I smiled as I saw her. She was indeed the ray of light in my dull existence. If it wasn't for her, I would have long taken my life. We linked hands and together entered the house. We were greeted by my husband's angry voice.

“Where have you been you scarecrow? Why didn't you go to the fields to scare away the birds with that ugly face of yours? In five minutes, I want you gone from my sight you...” his voice trailed off when he saw his daughter. Nico always restrained himself when Glory was around and I was grateful for that.

“I will go after I finish cooking,” I said timidly.

“I don't want to eat your tasteless food today. Quickly rush to the fields to scare off the birds before they destroy all the sorghum,” he said in a rather deceptively cool voice. I disregarded his fake coolness and rather reacted to the evil twinkle in his eyes as a warning to disappear from his sight before all hell broke loose. Hurriedly, I gathered all the house wares, stored them properly and headed to the fields with Glory. We were just about to arrive when we heard the sound of a vehicle approaching us from behind. Without thinking I took Glory's hand and hid behind a bush. The

car stopped near where we were hiding and out came two strange men and my husband. Relieved, I was about to leave our hiding place when I heard my husband say, “When we get to the farm, just shoot them both.”

A cold shiver ran down my spine and I went weak with fear. I covered Glory’s mouth to prevent her from making any noise. Her eyes looked like they would pop out of their sockets. I knew that my husband no longer wanted me but never had I imagined that he would want to kill us, especially Glory, whom he always said was his everything. I waited until they had passed where we were hiding and put Glory on my back and ran as fast as I could through the bushes. I was oblivious to the brush that was tearing against my flesh. My heart nearly stopped beating when I heard a loud booming sound like a gunshot behind us. I stopped to check if Glory was fine. I looked behind and to my surprise I saw huge flames near where we were.

I hid Glory and crept back to inspect the cause of the fire. To my relief, I found my husband’s car engulfed by a huge fire and I could hear their painful screams coming from the burning car. My husband must have realised that we had escaped and they must have followed us in the car. In their haste to catch up with us, the car had hit a tree and overturned. I sighed with relief, went back to Glory and took her home.

Indeed God works in mysterious ways; I couldn’t believe that I was free from my monster husband. Free at last. At his funeral, I shed crocodile tears. Although my daughter lost a father that day, I can’t help but think of my husband’s death that Saturday as nothing short of a miracle -- a blessing in disguise indeed.



Take-home message:

*When people are in an abusive relationship, they must look for appropriate psychosocial support. The Domestic Violence Act of 2008 can be used for protection orders by people in violent situations in the home.*



# DEVIL IN HER SAINT

PRECIOUS BARAEDI  
SELIBE PHIKWE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Selibe Phikwe District

The night was silent, echoed eerily by the stillness in the living room. Everyone was engulfed in tension, disappointment, guilt and regret. Chedu's father watched the retreating moon through the curtain peep, his wife attentive to a muted television programme, silent as a ghost.

It was so awkward. Chedu stood at the kitchen doorway rubbing her hands on her balloon tummy, and staring at the blackness outside. This was indeed a hard nut to crack, she thought. The voices of her parents arguing and pointing fingers at each other rang in her head. It was a hole they had all dug, thought Chedu, they just had to grab the bull by the horns.

A few months earlier, Chedu's father had called his wife and they sat down to talk. "I've been observing your child recently. I suspect she has started... seeing boys. She no longer performs well at school. She comes late from school and even the way she dresses has changed. She dresses like those whores in the streets."

Chedu's mother pretended not to be hearing, although the word 'whore' made her cringe inwardly. She took a sip of coffee and finally broke the silence. "Honey, lately I've been thinking about it as well. But then what can we do? Our culture doesn't allow us to talk to children about such issues, don't you think our girl is too young for that?" Silence followed the conversation and the topic was never re-visited until it was too late.

Chatting by the pool side of Lemepe Lodge in Molepolole, Chedu and her boyfriend basked in the sun as their skins felt the touch of the sunrays.

"Bae! You know what? I love you." Chedu told her boyfriend whilst popping a juicy red strawberry into her mouth.

"Let's get you home before your parents worry too much," he said in a

voice that Chedu thought would melt her heart.

Chedu felt lucky that Prince had chosen her. Prince was a boy in Chedu's eyes but a man by age. He was doing his final year at university studying media. All that he could do for Chedu was to promise her luxurious things. His words enchanted Chedu, melting her resistance into willingly losing her virginity for his promises.

Prince didn't waste time, he drove his queen home, but they had to pass by his place first. That was where Chedu and Prince tasted the forbidden fruit under the veil of love. Prince, twenty five years old, took away Chedu's innocence. Chedu was ten years younger. She was so drunk in love that she didn't see it coming. It never crossed her mind that there was a devil in her saint.

That same month when she missed her periods, she knew something was wrong. "Babe," she said to Prince.

"Yes love," Prince responded. Chedu couldn't face him that day. Her head was bent down. But then she was brave, she told him she missed her period.

"Are you serious? Don't play like that, pregnancy is not a joke."

Chedu looked at him with a straight face. Prince had never seen that expression before, signalling to him that Chedu was serious. The following day, they went for a pregnancy test together. The results were positive. Chedu was indeed pregnant. Prince got a shock of his life because he knew that the matter could land him in prison for sleeping with a minor.

On their way home, Prince said; "You know? I don't want you to ruin my future. Your pregnancy can cost me a lot in life. There is a traditional doc-

tor in Thamaga that I want you to see, he can make things normal again for you.”

“What do you mean ‘make things normal’,” she was shocked by his words. “If you think I’ll abort your baby, forget it. You’re so selfish. How dare you even think such things?”

Prince tried to calm her down, explaining the possibility of the solution to their problem. “Babe, the embryo is still developing. It’s not even tissues yet. It’s just fluid. So it’s not like you’ll be killing a person. Don’t be a cry baby, Chedu! You are mature enough to understand these things. Let’s get rid of the pregnancy.”

Chedu knew the consequences of induced abortion. “I don’t want to. I don’t want to die young.”

“Then remain with your pregnancy, you stubborn, silly girl. I’m done with you.” And with that, Prince fled.

Chedu’s heart broke when she heard that. She regretted the day she met him. Her life changed totally after that incident. She never felt comfortable around her colleagues because they made fun of her and she was ashamed of what she had done.



Take-home message:

*Family meetings between parents and children are essential and should include discussions on puberty, sexual and reproductive health. Regular communication within the home promotes healthy relationships.*





# **CHOICE ASSORTED**

**GOSEGO PILLAR**  
SETLALEKGOSI JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Francistown District

At fifteen years of age, Tebogo's dreams were thrown away like a bag of trash. Friends. Tebogo had to learn the hard way that friends could easily transform into enemies, or even something worse. She learnt that not everyone who smiled at you was necessarily your friend. Some friends, as Tebogo also learnt later, were wolves in sheep's clothing.

She was a beautiful girl – eyes, body and skin in harmony with each other. She also did remarkably well in academics at school. Problems started when she moved to a senior school in Francistown. In fact, the move to a higher school was not the problem. The problem was the decisions she started to make under the influence of her so-called friends. At the senior school, she met a couple of girls who were in their final academic year. Tebogo became friends with Theko and Kealeboga. She didn't know, when they befriended her, that they were notorious girls known in school for peddling drugs, for reckless behaviours such as sex scandals and for missing lessons.

A few weeks into the year, Theko and Kealeboga came to Tebogo in high spirits and smiles that could dim the light of the blazing sun. "Guess what, Tebbie?" They chorused. "That hot nigger has invited us to his birthday bash this Friday. Are you going?"

"Uhm...well..." Tebogo stuttered as she thought of what to say.

"Of course you're going," beamed Theko. "You can't afford to miss such a party. Imagine all the dudes that will be there! Choice assorted, baby!"

With their sleek, persuasive tongues, Theko and Kealeboga convinced the hesitant Tebogo. Throughout the days that led to the big Friday, Tebogo battled with her thoughts. Conscience warned her to not go, but then something else nudged her forward. *Choice assorted*. The girls had promised

a choice of good-looking boys. She was grown up now. Maybe it was time to live a little, Tebogo debated with her inner self. After all, biology taught them things. What use was it to score high marks on things she had no experience in. Next week, Tebogo decided, when the teacher taught about copulation and reproduction, she would understand, at least the copulation part, and later, the reproduction part too.

“My mother won’t allow me out at night,” Tebogo informed her friends. “She’s such a strict old woman.”

“Relax. Parents are easy to trick,” Kealeboga assured her. “We all stay in Selepa, so tell her you’re coming to study with us. She knows we’re friends, after all.”

Friday after school, Tebogo rushed home to ready herself for the party. “Mom, my friends and I have a revision session tonight at Kealeboga’s. We have exams on Monday.” Tebogo lied to her mother. As her friends had promised, it was a walk in the park. Her mother wished her well. So that she wouldn’t raise suspicions, Tebogo stashed her clothes in her school bag. Her mother would think it was full of books. But it contained her velvety mini dress, the crimson stilettos, wrist bangles, a pair of dangling earrings, a chrome pendant, a makeup kit, lipsticks and a Brazilian wig. She was going to dress up at Kealeboga’s home because her parents were away. Tebogo couldn’t wait to stand in front of the mirror and admire herself. *Choice assorted, baby!* Those boys were going to be blown away. They would fight over her. She would indeed have the pleasure of choosing from a box of delicious biscuits, oh, and how she was going to love tasting them!

While Tebogo studied herself in the mirror, the girls gawked at her. In their eyes, and though they tried to suppress it, Tebogo could see glim-

mers of jealousy, burning softly, yet intensely like coals of fire. She was way too stunning.

“Tebbie, you look amazing,” said Theko, faking a smile.

“Thank you,” she said. It was time to go to the party.

The music was already blaring loudly when they arrived. Tebogo noticed a lot of her schoolmates and several other people she didn’t know. As promised, there were so many boys, and men too. It was the boys that Tebogo was interested in, not the men. Theko offered her a bottle of *Storm* but she declined.

“It’ll put you on your toes, Tebbie. Take, it’s just for tonight,” Theko argued.

“No,” Tebogo refused. “I don’t drink. I’m okay with the fruit juice.”

The night went on well. Boys (and men) drooled over her, many making attempts at her. Then suddenly she felt dizzy. She stumbled once, twice and collapsed. Instead of falling on the ground, she fell on someone’s hands. The last words she heard before drifting away were; “Quick! Pull her to a dark corner where there is no light. Hurry! Yes, that’s it...” the voice was hushed yet vaguely familiar.

Somehow she could feel it, the gang rape. She was inanimate, unable to respond, unable to resist or talk, but her brain was alive. She felt the pain as a group of boys, or men, she didn’t know, raped her over and over. That familiar voice came again, rising and falling like a wind, into her ears, then floating away and back again, and away: “Do her! Yes. Your turn boy. Go! Fast before she wakes up. She thinks she’s smart. She thinks she’s Jennifer Lopez with all the expensive clothes and stuff. Teach her a lesson. We rule.

Not her. This is our territory. Not hers...”

*Theko.*

There was laughter, hysterical like that of a pack of hyenas. The boys were laughing. And the girls too.

*Theko and Kealeboga.*

Tebogo’s brain switched off and she became a lump of unconscious meat. She couldn’t feel anything anymore until she woke up at the hospital.

The doctors picked traces of a drug in her blood. Someone had drugged her. She remembered the hushed voices. Her friends must have thrown something in her drink. They had been poisonously jealous of her. A day later, the police captured the gang that raped her. Theko, Tebogo heard, committed suicide when she learnt that the police were coming for her. And Kealeboga tried to run away when she saw them coming, but fate always had its own way of choosing one’s destiny. She was knocked down by an oncoming vehicle as she ran across the road without looking. She was condemned to a wheelchair. For the three friends, Tebogo, Kealeboga and Theko, each one had a sad ending.

Sometime after the incident, Tebogo went back to school, a different school this time, but she always had to pack a box of ARVs in her backpack; the same bag that had packed expensive clothes that fateful night when she had so yearned for an assortment of choice.



Take-home message:

*Negative peer pressure can lead to dangerous circumstances. Parents have an obligation to ensure that their children are safe at all times. Children have the responsibility to prioritize their health and safety over temporary pleasure.*



# **THE EVIL AUNT**

**TLAMELO MOTSUMI**  
SHAKAWE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Okavango District

When she saw stains of blood on Tidimalo's sheets, her rough voice screamed, "You good for nothing creature! Didn't your mother teach you any manners? *Susu ke wena*!"

Tidimalo opened her mouth to release a swarm of words that throttled her since her Aunt came in. "I... I... I..." Tidimalo stammered.

Her aunt countered. "Oh, just shut that hole you call a mouth before I pull out your tongue!" She stormed out, the wind swaying her red dress in gusts like flames. She looked for a moment like an evil spirit ablaze. Tidimalo knew that this woman was the devil himself.

Tidimalo sat at the far end of the hut, cuddling herself like a new born shivering from the sharp breeze the world casts on its fresh skin. She was thinking of the peaceful and joyous days when her parents were still alive. How she wished she could turn back the hands of time. She and her parents were involved in a car accident which took the lives of her parents and rendered her unable to speak properly. She couldn't speak without stammering, sometimes, it was very, very difficult to even complete a single word.

She didn't exactly know what happened that day. What she recalled from the back of her mind was that, she and her father were taking her mom to the bus station, when just in a twinkle of an eye they hit an impala. Their Toyota Hilux skidded across the road, rolled over several times and then everything went black.

Interrupting her thoughts, Tidimalo's aunt barged in again, holding a package of sanitary pads. She threw the pack at Tidimalo the way she would throw a piece of rotten meat to a hungry street dog. "Put this on and clean this mess of yours," barked the aunt.

"But how..." Tidimalo wanted to ask. Without giving her a chance, her Aunt briskly left the room. Then Tidimalo did as she was told: put on the pad and washed the sheets.

The next day on her way to school, Tidimalo walked slowly. The tiny pil-

1 "You deaf girl!"



low stuck between her legs was weird. She had never before seen such a thing. She couldn't walk properly and she was nervous. What if it fell down? Won't the people of Shakawe laugh at her? She wished to see herself awake from the nightmare she was in.

Mr. Moeti, the teacher on duty at the gate that morning, shouted for her to run, signalling that time was almost up. In class, it was very uncomfortable to get settled in her chair. The teacher, Mrs. Seleke, started handing out their test papers. She called out their names, and they would walk to her desk, one by one, to collect their scripts. When it was Tidimalo's turn, Mrs. Seleke called three times but she just sat down, afraid to stand up. Tidimalo had noticed that there was a spot of blood on her skirt. She could even feel the wetness. Was the small, weird pillow leaking? Or had it fallen down somewhere?

Realising this, Mrs. Seleke instructed other students to go outside and pick up litter. Alone with Tidimalo, she helped her clean the chair, then took her to her counselling office.

"Tell me, Tidimalo. Is something bothering you," Mrs. Seleke, who was a counselling teacher, asked.

"No ma'am. Everyth...thththing is ffff...fine," Tidimalo said, biting her lower lip and eyes gazing unseeingly at her shoes.

With a soft and warm voice, Mrs. Seleke said "My child, I know that you are not telling the truth, so please feel free and tell me what is bothering you."

Tidimalo knew that a white knight had arrived in her dark night to chase away the darkness in her life. Then immediately Tidimalo bared her soul to Mrs. Seleke, telling her about her evil aunt, how she was abusing her and ruining her life. After hearing the heartbreaking story, the teacher decided to call Tidimalo's aunt, Khangsi, to her office.

At first Khangsi refused to oblige, saying that she had no time to waste on trivial matters. "Listen, Mrs. Whatever-you-said-your-name-was, I said I'm not coming there! Why should I engage in stupid conversations when I

have better and more important duties to attend to?”

“Ok great,” Mrs. Seleke said, her voice calm and her composure relaxed. “Do as you please, ma’am. I have enough evidence to ensure that you will rot behind bars. And remember, the new court magistrate hates child abusers. Good luck to you, ma’am.”

“Are you threatening me?” Khangi asked.

“No, ma’am. Why should I? I’m just telling you facts. The law cannot be deceived.”

“Where do I see you when I get to school?” Khangi said, the pride and heat in her voice waning.

In the counselling room, Khangi proved to be a very foul-mouthed person. It was not easy for Mrs. Seleke – the frustrations, arguments, misunderstandings and the throwing of vulgar language. It was very intense in that room. But Khangi finally gave in. Her anger turned into tears. She confessed about all the burning hatred she had for her sister, Tidimalo’s mother, and ultimately taking it all out on the child. She confessed again that no one ever talked to Tidimalo about sexual health and sexuality.

The following day Mrs. Seleke called Tidimalo and her aunt to reconcile them. The moment was filled with emotion and newly discovered love. After that day they lived peacefully together, love reigned in their hearts. They lived their lives to the fullest and tried to make every moment count. They say that family is not all about having the same blood or surname but also about good memories that take your breath away.



Take-home message:

*Parents and guardians have the responsibility to guide boys and girls through puberty, adolescence, sexual and reproductive health matters. The girl child should further be supported with comprehensive menstrual knowledge and resources.*



**STRINGS**  
**ATTACHED**  
MESHELLE K. DITSHOTLO  
SWANENG HILL SCHOOL  
Serowe District

His hands roughly explored my body, touching spots that he knew would arouse his inner animal being. His other hand was pressed against my mouth. I was baffled, gagging in attempt to shout. I tried to fight off his advances by pushing away his groping hand. Despite my protests, the man was eager to devour my pride, anxious to use the strength of his lust to destroy me. At that moment I faced the bitter realisation that my future was in jeopardy. I was young and naïve.

Almost a year before my life turned topsy-turvy, I was admitted into a senior secondary school in Serowe. To my pleasure, I was placed in the same class with my childhood friends Wandi and Amantle. School was vastly more entertaining than home. We lived in a one-roomed shack surrounded by a drying hedge fence. I wasn't proud of our home, and I'd rather not show anyone where I stayed.

But things changed at home. We ran out of food and I fell behind with my school fees. One day when I arrived home from school, I found my younger brother Atlang sobbing bitterly because he was hungry. There was no food at all in the shack. I informed my mother about the food shortage and that I needed money for school fees. There was nothing mother could do. She was equally under duress, stressed to a point of sickness.

This went on for days and I tried my best to make ends meet. At school during assembly, the Principal called out names of all students who owed school fees. I was embarrassed when my name was called. Other students started mocking us, referring to us as 'those who attended school on credit'. That day during study time, our class teacher, Mr. Marumo, sent for me. Quickly I rushed to his office.

In his comfortable, air-conditioned office, Mr. Marumo offered me a seat. "I called you in regard to your school fees," he said.

"Sir," I said, trying to interrupt him before he could continue with the topic of school fees. I was already fed up with that issue. Everywhere I went in school it was 'school fees this' or 'school fees that', teachers and students all alike.

“I understand,” he said. There was a wicked smile on his lips and I thought he was mocking me like students did, making fun of the fact that I was too poor to pay my school fees. I wanted to hate him right then.

The following day I got the shock of my life. Our Head of House handed me a payment receipt and thanked me for finally clearing my school fees debt. Instead of excitement, I was confused. Did my mother come to pay? No, it couldn't be her. Where would she have gotten that much money from, all of a sudden?

A week later I learnt it was Mr. Marumo who paid for my school fees. From then onwards, he started treating me differently from other students. He even started lying to people that he was my uncle. Mr. Marumo gave me money every day. Because we were poor, I accepted the money. But of course, I would later learn, there were strings attached.

Then he started visiting me at home, bringing food stuffs, clothes and even pocket money for me and my brother. I never once suspected that Mr. Marumo had ulterior motives. I merely thought that his generosity was an act of kindness, until one day his true colours were finally revealed in such a shocking manner.

One day after lessons, Mr. Marumo requested me to help him take some exercise books to his apartment. I did as he requested. As I was about to leave, he said, “Wait, I want to give you something, please have a seat.” He rummaged through his pockets and handed me some bank notes. My conscience began to scream at me for the first time. Why was this man giving me money like that?

“No, thank you,” I said and stood to leave his apartment. He pushed me back down onto the sofa.

“Relax, I won't hurt you.”

“Let go of me!”

He pushed me hard, holding my hands tightly. I knew, right then, that something bad was about to happen. He was about to get the benefits of

his money. I tried to struggle for freedom but I was just a feather against Mr. Marumo's strength. He didn't even put much physical effort into pinning me down. His hands roughly explored my body, touching spots that he knew would arouse his inner animal being. I opened my mouth to shout but he blocked it with a huge palm, pressing my jaws together and squashing my lips into a suffocating silence. I was baffled, gagging in attempt to shout. I tried to fight off his advances by pushing away his groping hand.

Despite my protests, he ripped my shirt open, exposing my bare breasts. I heard him breathe hard. I tried to kick him but he was way too close for my leg to swing at him. His hands massaged my breasts and he groaned with pleasure. I wanted to spit in his face but he had my mouth blocked. With the force of an animal, he pulled down my skirt and I knew then that this was it. When he started briskly undoing his belt, I closed my eyes, shutting them tightly as though the action would prevent the impending pain. But it didn't. Mr. Marumo raped me with such a ferocious force that I thought I wouldn't live to see the next day.

A few days later, Mr. Marumo attempted a swapping transfer to another school but I had already reported the matter. The police knocked on his door as he was packing his stuff.

Even though he was now in police custody awaiting trial, the man left me with memories of that unpleasant incident. My life was ruined. I started having hatred towards men, and most of the time I would have nightmares about the incident. I also lost weight. I contemplated suicide because my life was shattered. But my mother, God bless her, was always by my side, nursing me and assuring me that everything would be alright.

"He will rot in jail," my mother said.

"I don't want him to rot in jail. I want him out sooner than later," I said, surprising my mother.

"Why? He's damaged you."

"I want to kill him myself," I said. "I promise you mom, I will kill him at the slightest chance I get. Let them free him. And he will see!"

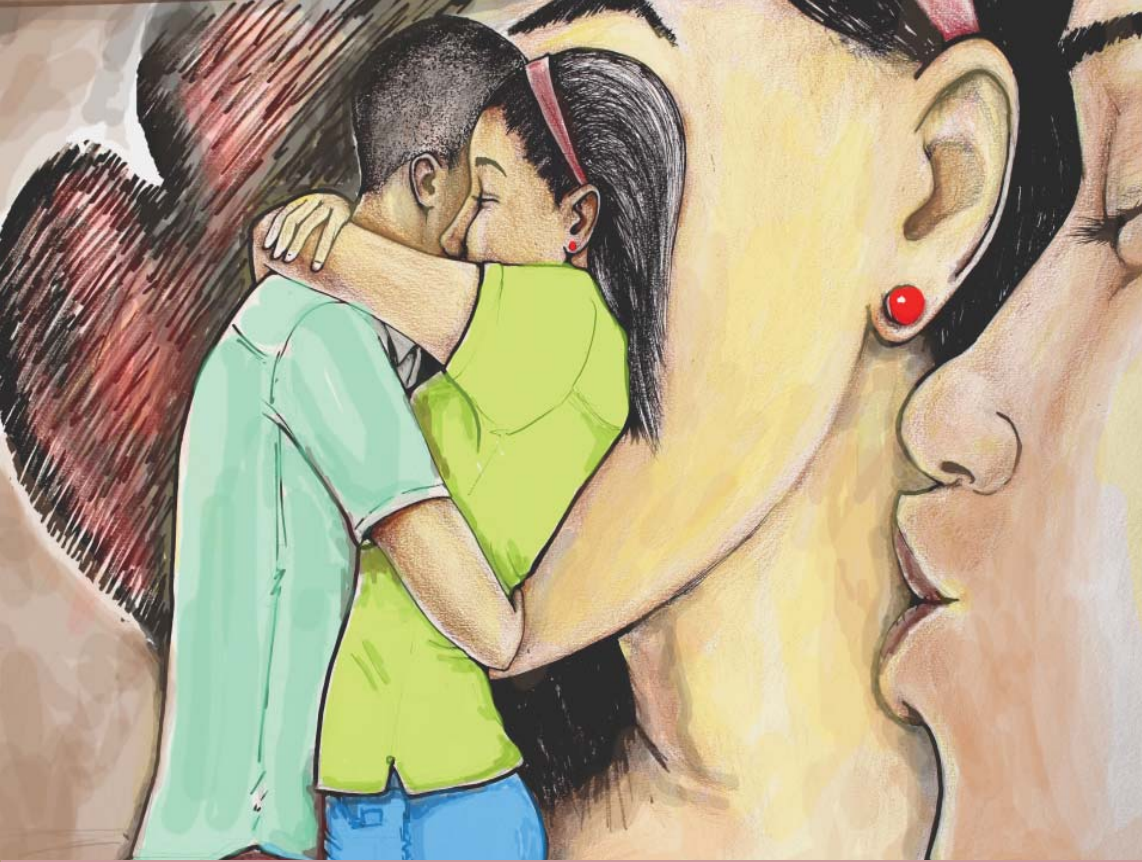
My mother hugged me and I sobbed into her chest.



Take-home message:

*Teachers are custodians of children in their care at school. Their duties include care and protection of children and they should not use their power and status to abuse children who are vulnerable.*





# **THAT NIGHT OF PASSION**

PHATSIMO MOSEKI  
TSODILO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
Ngami District

I had a boyfriend once. He had a milky brownish skin like chocolate. This guy was handsome and his heart was as beautiful as his physical appearance. I met him in secondary school when he was in form 5 and I was in form 4. He was smart enough for his level though he had D's and E's lined up in his report card. I didn't really care about his report card. It was just a piece of paper that couldn't compare with his heart. One Thursday night he dropped by our house, unannounced. I hadn't told him that my mother had left for the weekend that morning but somehow he must have found out. When mom left, she told me to take care of myself and that she'd be back by Sunday. She had said the words with so much trust I could see it in her eyes.

The intimate and seductive fragrance of Setso's strong perfume hit me as I greeted him by the doorway. He kissed me on my cheek, such a gentleman. We sat on the couch and watched a movie. When the movie ended, I went to the bedroom to take off my jewellery. Setso followed me, and I had no idea of what would follow. In the bedroom, he pulled me closer to him and I could feel his hot breath and my waist against his pelvic bone. My eyes stared into his, searching in delight. When he licked my left ear, I could feel the earth shift. He started kissing my neck, slowly, taking his time, his lips moving from one sensitive spot to another. I gasped and closed my eyes. Setso was an expert in kissing. I felt him lift my top and one thing led to another. The rest, as they say, became history.

We took a long, hot bath in the morning. Missing school on a Friday didn't hurt a bit. No one was really in the mood for school on a Friday, not even the teachers. Throughout the day, we planned our future, Setso and I making promises to each other. He went home on the evening of Saturday, just in case mom decided to come home early Sunday morning. He kissed me goodbye and I wanted to cling to him forever.

“See you soon, my love,” he said. “Can I call you later, FaceTime?”

Fifteen weeks later I was at the hospital doing my regular checkups. Pregnancy check – negative. Central nervous system check – perfect. Eyes and ears – all good. HIV – positive. What?! POSITIVE. Breath in, breath out, in, out, look again. POSITIVE. My heart thumped like pistons of an engine, my chest as hot as a running engine and I swear there must have

been smoke coming out of my screaming ears.

“Marang! Can you hear me?” the doctor asked.

“What?” I jerked back.

“The last time you were here, you were HIV negative. Have you been having unprotected sex lately?” asked the doctor.

Setso. The name rang in my head, bouncing off the walls of my swelling skull. Setso. Tears burned my eyes as I thought about that night of passion. I had stolen my mother’s contraceptive pills, thinking I was protecting myself. And indeed I protected myself, but only against pregnancy.

The doctor brought me a glass of water and sedatives but I just stared at the wall. Maybe the wall had answers. Maybe some miraculous hand would scribble the answers on the wall, like it did in that biblical Nebuchadnezzar scripture. It was Setso, of course, for I had not been with anyone else but him. How could he have done this? Was he aware of his status? What of my future now? Our future that we had planned? Was this the beginning of my ending? Oh, God, how I desperately needed the inscription on the wall: *mene mene tekel, uparsin*<sup>1</sup>. Was I maybe like that wicked King in the Bible for whom the mysterious words were written? Was this a punishment of sorts? The doctor enrolled me in the antiretroviral programme and I received my first treatment right then.

The next day at school I kept calm, suppressing the lava of feelings boiling inside of me. Setso came rushing over when he saw me.

“Hi booboo bear,” he said, playing the romantic he had always been but I wasn’t moved.

“Go away,” I brushed him off.

“What’s wrong?” he froze in surprise.

“Just go,” I turned away from him.

“I’m not leaving until you talk to me. What’s the matter? What have I

1 The phrase “mene mene tekel uparsin” appears in Daniel 5.

done?”

“What you’ve done is, you’ve had unprotected sex with me,” I grimaced like I had bitten a bitter fruit. “And you’ve given me the virus! Go ahead and do the expected – deny it!”

Setso stared at me with an expressionless face. He wasn’t shocked. He wasn’t surprised. So he must have known of his status, I concluded in my head. “So you knew, you pig, you warthog!” I shouted. I clawed at him, trying to scratch his face but he grabbed my hands and pulled me into a tight hug. I sobbed into his chest. We stood like that for what seemed like eternity. Setso was still warm, despite the current situation.

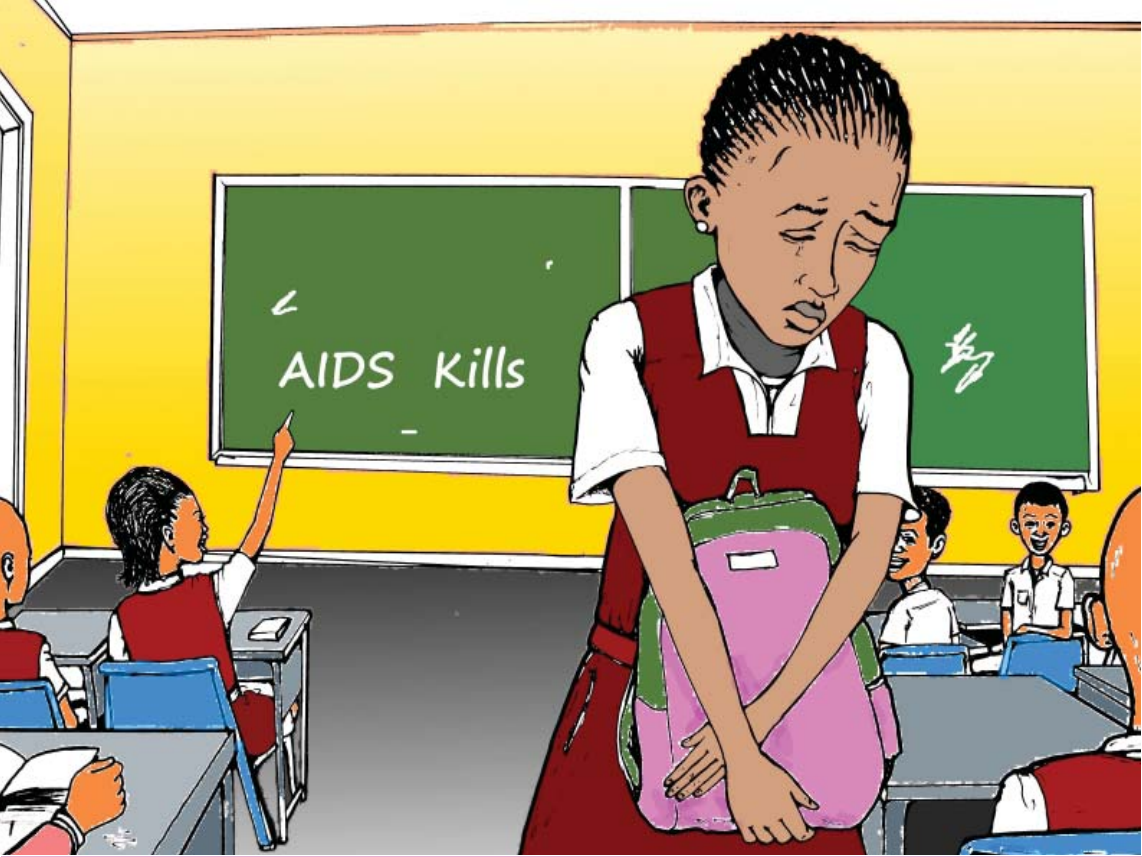
“Marang? I’m so sorry. Yes I am HIV positive, I have the virus but I don’t understand how you could have been infected because I have been taking my ARVs so I thought I couldn’t infect anyone. If I had known I would have worn a condom. I love you so much Marang, I would never, ever do anything to hurt you. I honestly didn’t know. Marang, I’m so sorry.”

As the days progressed, Setso became even closer to me, proving that he wasn’t, after all, a liar. We went for regular check-ups, monitoring the virus levels. In time, we learnt to live with the virus and focused on our dreams. We knew as long as we continued to take our HIV medication and go for regular check-ups we would maintain our healthy status and low virus levels. We married six years later. We were not going to let a virus, or anything else for that matter, determine our destiny. A year after our marriage, I gave birth to a bubbly, healthy and HIV free baby. We called her *Botshelo*.



Take-home message:

*This story depicts the value of a loving and supportive relationship in managing and living positively with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus..*



# **THE QUADHOOD SISTERS**

MAGDELINE BAKWALI  
TUTUME McCONNELL COLLEGE  
Tutume District

Mr. Mbakani rushed into the classroom and announced loudly, “Charity Phiri, Kenny Wadza, Malebogo Mbera and Palesa Nzaya, wait for me outside, now. The teacher walked to the middle of the class, his shoes squeaking on the polished floor like rats. The class was silent, before the school’s most feared teacher. “Listen to me carefully,” he said. “I don’t condone rowdy behaviour. Erase this nonsense you wrote on the board or I will slap the hell out of every single one of you right now!” A boy in the front jumped to the board with a duster. It dawned on the students: the Quadhood Sisters had done something again. What could it be this time around?

Since she came to the college, Nelly had been confined to two corners; one physical and one emotional. The physical one was in the far right corner of the classroom where Nelly sat since the first time she came to the college. In the corner there was a ramshackle desk; rusty and rickety with a pile of books on it. Behind it was an equally sorry-state chair with only three legs. The handicapped chair was supported on one side with a brick to prevent it from toppling over. That was the space in which Nelly spent most of her time in school, except for when she was in her dormitory at the boarding hostels.

One evening she sat in class, trying hard to ignore the noisy buzz of her classmates. She was stuck to her corner, sitting at her old desk trying to revise her Mathematics. Examinations were coming soon. She scratched her head with a pencil, and chewed the bottom end as though she was sucking answers from it.

The siren blared and Nelly softly pushed the desk away and started walking to the hostels. At the hostel, she unlocked her closet. It was time for her medication. She had to take the pills before sleeping. But first she had to eat. Medication had to be taken after a meal. She tipped a packet of instant porridge into a bowl and stirred it with cold water. She swallowed the soft puree in one gulp and then looked for her tablets in the locker. She couldn’t find them. Frantically she rummaged through her locker but couldn’t find her bottle of pills.

Four girls walked into Nelly’s dorm room, swinging their hips like they

were walking the ramp of a pageant contest. Surprised, Nelly wondered what the Quadhood Sisters wanted with her. She ignored them and continued her search. She dug things out, scattering them on the floor.

“You’re looking for something?” asked Malebogo, poking Nelly on the shoulder.

“Ooh! What a nicely made up bed with beautiful sheets,” Kenny said and threw herself on Nelly’s bed. Nelly could see that they wanted to stir a fight. She wasn’t in the mood for that, and she wasn’t going to give them the attention either.

“Come on girl, are you dumb?” persisted Malebogo. The girls started clapping and snapping their fingers, making a noise intended to irritate Nelly. All the while, Nelly’s dorm mates watched silently. No one wanted to intervene because they knew what the Quadhood Sisters were capable of. They didn’t want to turn attention on themselves. The clapping and snapping of fingers was unnerving and achieved its objective.

“Hey you cheap nothings!” Nelly screamed at them. “Can’t you just mind your own business and get the hell out of here?!” The other students in the room *aahed and oohed*, evidently scared for Nelly. From where did she get such nerve to shout at the gang?

Instead of a violent response, the gang of girls laughed. Kenny fished a bottle from her pocket and waved it in the air. “We guess you’re looking for this, right?” Nelly couldn’t believe her eyes. How did these girls get access to her locked locker and steal her pills. “Come on,” Kenny continued, “it’s no longer a secret. We all know what these are.” Kenny turned and faced the other girls in the room. They were watching in silence, wondering what this spectacle was leading to. “Girls, do you know what these are?” The girls shook their heads no. “Well, these are called ARVs. They are given to very sick people. Your roommate here has AIDS. And she’s the cause of the misfortune in this school.” With that, the Quadhood Sisters marched out of the room, with Nelly’s pills.

Nelly felt like the walls of the room were closing in on her. She wanted to



vomit. Tears burned her face and she crawled under her blanket, curled into a ball and soaked the pillow with tears.

The next day in school, her environment had changed. Clearly, the gang had spread the word. All eyes were on her. Friends started shunning her. People walked away from her. When she stepped into her classroom, she noticed that the students who used to sit next to her had moved away. The ramshackle desk in the corner was now in isolation. Embarrassed, eyes cast to the floor and tears once more itching in her eyes, Nelly sat down. She heard the class laugh and when she looked up, words were scrawled on the blackboard with white chalk; AIDS KILLS. She knew that handwriting. It was Kenny's, one of the Quadhood Sisters. She looked over at them and Malebogo poked a middle finger in the air for her.

Their class teacher arrived for registration and called out their names. He didn't notice the writing on the board. One by one, they shouted 'present!' When she called Nelly's name, she didn't respond.

"Nelly Ntswel!" the teacher called. Silence. He looked up and saw Nelly at the corner, her shoulders slumped and a slight tremor shaking her chest. "Nelly, are you okay?" He walked over to her and noticed that she was crying. The teacher asked Nelly to follow him to the office.

A few minutes later, another teacher, Mr. Mbakani, the most feared teacher in the school, stormed into the room and immediately called out the Quadhood Sisters, instructing them to wait for him outside. He looked at the board and noticed the writing. Mr. Mbakani was never to be messed with. Within the blink of an eye, the black board was clear of the words.

Since that day, things changed for the better for Nelly. The gang of girls was suspended from school. Nelly accepted herself and was even confident enough to give motivational talks to other students. She became, ultimately, a celebrity, and no longer an outcast.



Take-home message:

*Stigma and prejudice can be hurtful to HIV survivors. Institutions need to be swift in their dealings with it.*

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THEMES DISCUSSED

## 1. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN BOTSWANA

### 1.1. What is gender-based violence?

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed towards individuals or groups because of their gender, which is a socially constructed difference between men and boys, women and girls. A person's gender is different from their sex. Sex refers to biological differences between men and women. Sex is fixed as it is defined by chromosomes and hormones whereas gender is socially defined and varies over time and place. Gender-based violence might be physical (being beaten or slapped), sexual (rape and defilement), financial (withholding resources), and psychological violence (threats, humiliation, mocking and controlling behaviours).

### 1.2. Does gender-based violence occur in Botswana?

Yes, it does. In Botswana, two out of three (2/3) women have experienced violence, mostly from men they know, whereas worldwide only one out of every three (1/3) women has experienced violence (Machisa & Dorp 2012).

Most cases of violence are domestic, committed by men against their wives or cohabiting partner. Domestic violence, assault, incest, rape and even murder is an escalating social problem in Botswana and has devastating effects not just on the victim but on other family members as well (Mookodi 2004).

### 1.3. Why is there a high incidence of gender-based violence in Botswana?

Men use violence against women in Botswana because they can. The use of violence is socially acceptable, transferred from one generation to the next. Women and girls are unequal to men; overall, they are less economically successful and often dependent on men for financial support. Lack of personal income makes women more likely to bear violence without complaint for fear of losing that support.

Despite being signatory to a number of regional and international protocols and laws that promote gender equality, it is the long standing cultural, religious and social norms that continue to dictate women and men's roles in Botswana (Machisa & Dorp 2012).

Women are valued differently; they do significantly more unpaid work than men including child minding, housekeeping and general family support (Ferrant 2014).

Marriage or cohabitation is often seen as granting men rights to sex with their partners whenever they want and the power to enforce this right through force if necessary. Where women are seen as inferior to men the opportunity for violence is greater as social sanction against violence is limited, if not entirely absent (WHO 2013). This culture of acceptance of violence by men against women and girls makes reporting incidents of violence to police or other authorities unlikely, only one in every ten (1/10) women who have experienced violence will report the case (Machisa & Dorp 2012).

High levels of alcohol consumption, violence and increased susceptibility to HIV infection are intimately related (Phorano et al. 2005).

All these factors contribute to Botswana's high levels of gender-based violence.

#### **1.4. What is the effect of gender-based violence?**

For the individual survivor GBV affects their physical, sexual and reproductive, mental and psychological health. The effects can be immediate and acute as well as long lasting and chronic, and these negative health consequences may persist long after the violence has stopped. The more severe the level of violence, the greater the impact will be on the survivor's health. Health consequences affect productivity which in turn will affect household income and consequently lead to poverty.

Women in violent relationships lack the power to refuse unwanted sex or negotiate for safe sex and are therefore at risk of HIV infection and unwanted pregnancies (Heise et al. 2002). Abusive men are more likely to have HIV and impose risky sexual practices on their partners (Machisa & Dorp 2012).

Gender-based violence threatens family structures; children suffer emotional damage when they watch their mothers and sisters being battered; two-parent (as opposed to single parent homes) homes may break up, leaving the new female heads of households to struggle against increased poverty and negative social repercussions. Psychological scars (Maundeni 2000) often affect healthy and rewarding relationships in the future. Victims of gender violence may vent their frustrations on their children and other family members, thereby transmitting and intensifying the negative experiences of those around them. Children, on the other hand, may come to accept violence as an acceptable means of conflict resolution and communication. It is in these ways that violence is reproduced and perpetuated (Maundeni 2000).

#### **1.5. What is Botswana doing to end gender-based violence?**

Botswana is signatory to a number of regional and global laws and protocols that are designed to protect women and girls and prevent gender-based violence.

- Botswana ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimi-

nation Against Women (CEDAW) and the Optional Protocol.

- Domestic Violence Act No. 10 of 2008. An Act designed to provide for the protection of survivors of domestic violence and for matters connected therewith.
- Children’s Act No. 8 of 2009. The Act is concerned with the protection of children and young persons and the elimination of child labour.
- Affiliation Proceedings (Amendment) Act 1999, which is a simple clear procedure for an unmarried woman to obtain support for her child from the father.
- Dissolution of Marriage Act is an Act to make provision for disposal of property after divorce between persons subject to any Botswana customary law.

Numerous programmes have been implemented that address individual and structural determinants of HIV infection and many of them have been successful. Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) has resulted in a near zero mother to child infection rate. Other programmes have included behaviour change interventions and communications, encouraging male involvement in sexual health issues, promoting delayed sexual activity in young people, mainstreaming gender sensitivity and equality in the workplace (specifically in local and national government) to name a few.

## 2. HIV & AIDS AND ANTI-RETROVIRAL TREATMENT ADHERENCE IN BOTSWANA – THE FACTS

### 2.1. What is the prevalence of HIV in Botswana?

Botswana has a national HIV prevalence rate of 21.9% which is the third highest rate of HIV infection in the world after Lesotho and Swaziland (NACA 2015).

### 2.2. Who is most at risk of HIV infection?

Adolescent girls and young women are most at risk of HIV infection together with key populations (female sex workers and men who have sex with men). Figure 1 below shows the percentage of females and males who are HIV infected by age and sex in 2013 (NACA 2015). Boys and girls were about equally infected until age 10 and then the prevalence of HIV infection in girls began to rise sharply. Between ages 15–30, the proportion of females infected with the HIV virus was more than double that of males, with a peak of 50.6% of females

#### *Least risky sexual behaviors*

- *Oral sex is much less risky than anal or vaginal sex.*
- *Sexual activities that do not involve contact with body fluids (semen, vaginal fluid, or blood) carry no risk of HIV transmission.*
- *Anal sex is the highest-risk sexual activity for HIV transmission.*

ages 30–35 being infected. Males become infected later in life than females in general. Among males, the prevalence of HIV infection peaked at age 40–44 (43.8%), and the proportion of men infected was somewhat higher than women until age 60 and above (Ola, 2016).

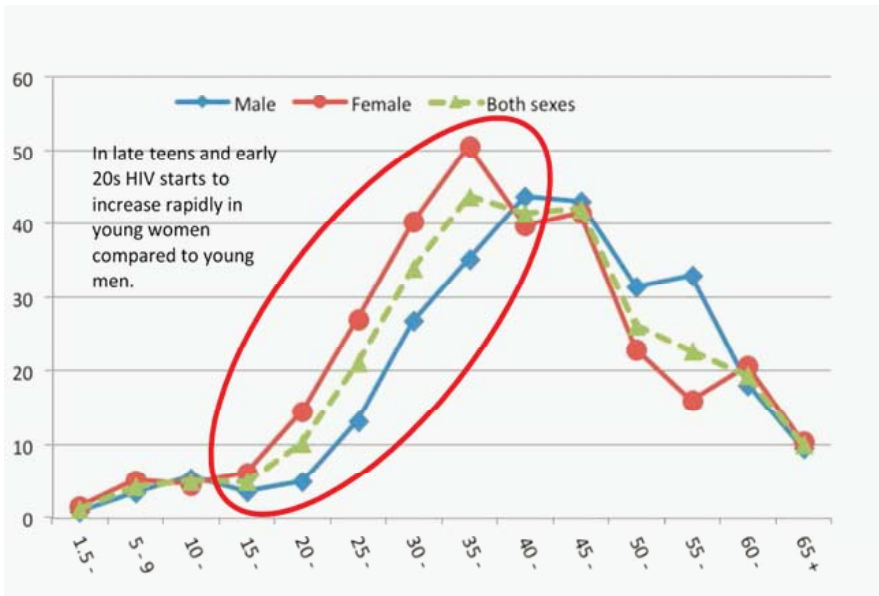


Figure 1, HIV prevalence in Botswana by age and sex in 2013

### 2.3. Preventing HIV infection

HIV infection is a sexually transmitted disease. It passes from a person infected with HIV to a person who is not infected through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex. Consequently, preventing the spread of HIV infection requires uninfected individuals to practise safe sex to maintain their negative status and infected individuals to take their antiretroviral therapy (ART) medication as directed, and to practise safe sex. For people who are HIV positive, to prevent the spread of the HIV infection requires always using condoms and choosing the least risky sexual behaviours and taking ART medication the right way, every day. The medicines reduce the amount of virus (viral load) in their blood and body fluids, maintain health, prolong life and greatly reduce the possibility of transmitting HIV to sexual partners.

Although preventing HIV infection seems straightforward, in fact practising safe sex, taking medication regularly and choosing less risky sexual behaviours requires considerably more than just personal choice and decision making. Sexual behaviour and medication compliance are made up of a number of personal (e.g. negotiation skills) and structural elements (e.g. access to condoms and lu-

bricants).

Understanding how HIV is spread, particularly which section of the population is affected most (Figure 1 above), steers the direction and content of HIV prevention programmes and makes them more likely to succeed. It's clear that in Botswana, adolescent girls and young women are most vulnerable to HIV and the underlying reasons for that are the marked male/female differences in sexual debut (first sexual encounter), intergenerational sex (sex between girls and older men), transactional sex (and sex work), multiple partners and partner concurrency (many sexual partners at the same time), low condom use and sexually transmitted infections (Kharsany & Karim 2016). New HIV infections among women aged 15-49 have risen from 4,500 in 2013 to 5,200 in 2016 and this increase is driven by intergenerational sex between young girls and older males (Ola, 2016).

In addition, gender inequality in Botswana is a major barrier to HIV prevention efforts. Women have less access to resources, work, education and power than men. There are "...unequal employment opportunities, unequal access to wealth, unfair division of labour in the household and generally unequal power relations." (Phaladze & Tlou 2006). The subordination of women to men makes personal HIV prevention difficult. Women are unable to practice abstinence, mutual faithfulness or the use of the male condom because none of these behaviours is under women's control. It is social norms and social structures that shape sexual behaviour, violence and relationships in ways that undermine efforts to avoid, prevent and treat HIV infection (Phaladze & Tlou 2006).

A recent innovation in the prevention of HIV infection in high risk groups is the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has been proven to substantially reduce the risk of HIV infection in people that are at high-risk (Kharsany & Karim 2016).

#### **2.4. Controlling the HIV/AIDS Epidemic - Antiretroviral treatment (ART)**

Controlling the HIV/AIDS epidemic is about linking people who are HIV+ with services so that they can access anti-retroviral treatment. Once on ART people living with HIV become less infectious as the viral load is suppressed.

The only way to know whether a person is infected with HIV is through HIV testing. If a person is infected but is not tested or treated, the virus slowly weakens the immune system. After several years, the disease begins to affect the body's ability to fight infections and certain cancers and the symptoms of AIDS appear.

When a person who is HIV+ is tested and anti-retroviral treatment is initiated the amount of HIV virus present in the blood drops, limiting its ability to replicate and reducing the risk of progressing to AIDS. If a person with HIV discontinues treatment, then the person's HIV viral load can begin to increase again so

it is vital that anyone infected with HIV should always take his or her medication exactly as prescribed.

In Botswana, anti-retroviral treatment coverage for people living with HIV / AIDS is highest in women aged 25+ at 73% and lowest amongst those younger than 15. Botswana's overall viral suppression rate is 96.5%, however younger people have lower rates with the < 15 years olds at 89.6%.

In 2017 a total of 37,972 women aged 25 and above were tested for HIV in Botswana and 2,184 of them were HIV positive (5.8%). The women in this age bracket have a prevalence of 34.2% which is the highest amongst all age and sex groups.

### **3. PARENT-CHILD COMMUNICATION& TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

When teenagers become pregnant, a number of problems occur. If they are at school, they have to drop out until the child is born and although they may return after the birth, they will have typically missed 3 to 6 months of schooling, which is difficult to make up. As a result, teenage mothers lag behind their peers, which affect their grades and their subsequent careers.

#### **3.1 Consequences of teenage pregnancy**

The earlier girls become pregnant the higher the likelihood of physical and reproductive damage and sexually transmitted infections including HIV. Although a teenager is biologically able to conceive, the pelvis is usually not fully developed, making labour and birth extremely risky for teenager's health.

#### **3.2 What influences adolescent sexual behaviour?**

Peers, social media, family and community all influence adolescent sexual behaviour. For a few adolescents, the pregnancy is planned but for most, the pregnancy is unwanted and unplanned. In order to prevent unplanned pregnancy, adolescents need to be able to access and use contraceptives correctly and negotiate for safer sex. There are a number of barriers to safe sex for adolescents including health worker bias against adolescent sexual health needs; pressure to have children; fear of side effects; lack of knowledge on correct use and difficulty negotiating contraceptive use with their sexual partner.

#### **3.3 How can parents and guardians make a difference?**

Parents and members of the extended family have always been important in the development of adolescent sexual decision-making. Just discussing sexuality with an adult helps them make better decisions. Together parent and child develop better interpersonal communication skills and the teenager acquires stronger sexual negotiation skills. A sense of self-efficacy influences sexual debut, particularly for females (Bastien et al. 2011).



The results of good communication between parents and adolescents about sexuality include delayed sexual debut, an increased likelihood of condom use and a reduction in teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections including HIV (Magowe et al. 2017).

Despite these benefits, the communication between Botswana adolescents and parents on issues such as sexual relationships, early pregnancy, HIV, and contraception is often very limited.

Education, particularly secondary education is associated with higher contraceptive use, increased age of marriage, reduced number of births, and increased use of health services. The longer teenagers stay in secondary school the less likely they are to ever have had sex or be HIV positive compared with those who leave school early. The longer they remain in school the greater the benefit. Secondary education is strongly associated with decreased HIV rates and the reduction of risky sexual behaviour (e.g., early sexual debut, number of sexual/casual partners, and unprotected sex).

The benefits of knowing about sex and sexuality, delaying sexual debut, using contraceptives at every sexual encounter and practising safe sex empowers teenagers with the requisite knowledge and skills to make healthy life fulfilling decisions.

## TEENAGE PREGNANCY KEY FACTS

*Every year, almost 21 million girls aged 15-19 years, and 2 million girls under 15 years become pregnant in developing regions.*

*Approximately 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 years and 2.5 million girls under 16 give birth each year in developing regions.*

*Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death for 15 to 19 year-old girls globally.*

*Every year, some 3.9 million girls aged 15 to 19 years undergo unsafe abortions.*

*Teenage mothers face higher risks of eclampsia, endometritis, and systemic infections than women aged 20 to 24 years,*

*Babies born to adolescent mothers face higher risks of low birthweight, preterm delivery, and severe neonatal conditions.*

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END

# Anecdotes on **EXPRESSING EXPERIENCES**

Between these two covers await forty anecdotes penned by students from nineteen secondary schools in Botswana. Though written in the form of fiction, these stories are a bagful of realities experienced in the different societies within which these young writers live. The experiences expressed in here are inspired by real life situations. Although there are several sub-themes imbedded in the stories, these expressions touch mainly on four major themes; Gender Based Violence, Parent & Child Communication on Sexual Health and Sexuality, HIV/AIDS and Treatment Adherence, and Teenage Pregnancy.

*Anecdotes on Expressing Experiences* is a two-book compilation of short stories meant to inform, to teach and to inspire. It is also hoped that readers of these books, especially survivors of gender-based violence, teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS will find solace, comfort and hope in the messages conveyed herein.

These books are supported by the ACHAP Global Fund and BONELA, and implemented by WoMen Against Rape, Maun, Botswana. Jump in and enjoy the ride!

