

Four Survivor Testimonies – Rustenburg, South Africa

[1] Dineo Lekone* was raped by a male acquaintance on the night of her birthday in September 2016.

“We had been drinking in Brits with my girlfriend and some of his friends, and after a glass of wine or two we went to Oukasië [township]. When we got there his friends complained that the drinks were warm, and so we went to Garankuwa, to a place called Sho’t Left,” she says, seated in the counseling room of the Kgomotso Care Centre** in Letlhabile Community Health Centre.

When Lekone’s girlfriend disappeared, she called and called until her airtime ran out. Her male friend offered to take Lekone to a petrol station to buy more airtime.

“He bought an electricity voucher for himself and he said we must go to his place to load electricity. I agreed,” she says.

At his apartment, Lekone’s friend asked her to come in for a while, and once indoors he said he would not be able to drive her home, as he was too tired.

“He prepared another room for me, and while I was busy undressing he came in, saying he wanted to sleep with me. He was dating this girl at the time, and he said, *‘what you wish to do with your girlfriend, you will do with me tonight’*. I refused. He threatened to kill me and throw my body in the Crocodile River.”

After being raped repeatedly, Lekone was dropped near her girlfriend’s home.

“She advised me to report the incident.”

Police officers took Lekone to Kgomotso Care Centre (KCC) at Letlhabile Community Health Centre, where she was given post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV, counselled, and finally examined by a forensic nurse, who told Lekone to come back the next day for more counselling.

“The next day a nurse named Cecilia, from Doctors Without Borders, came to fetch me for my counselling session. She and my girlfriend played a big role in helping me to go through this,” she says.

The repeated postponement of Lekone’s rapist’ trial has led her to doubt the justice system, and whether she should continue with the case.

“At church they tell me I should go on with it, so okay. I don’t think I am the only one he did this to, and I can’t rely on others to come forward. I can’t keep quiet, I will talk.”

IMAGE CODES: MSF213421; MSF213449; MSF213443

[2] When Constance Phiri* entered her home on the evening of 26 May 2015 she felt uneasy, and told her 7 year-old daughter and 20 year-old son that she was going to sleep the feeling off. After being woken by a noise Phiri went to investigate, and met three male intruders in the passage, all of them wearing balaclavas and carrying guns.

“They asked me where my husband was and I said he was working the night shift at the mine. They asked if I had a gun and I said ‘no’. They said, ‘*go and fetch the condoms*,’” she says, speaking in the rooms of the Kgomotso Care Centre** in Bapong Community Health Centre.

The men searched the house and locked Phiri’s daughter and son in a room.

“Then one pulled the blanket away from me and got busy, the second followed, then lastly the third. I was helpless - I did not know what to do. I was praying in my head – ‘*God help me*,’” says Phiri.

The men took Phiri’s three-piece ring from her finger and “said their goodbyes”.

“I was so relieved when they left. I told my son that they had raped me, and I could tell he felt helpless – he felt like he had done nothing to help me. I said to him, ‘*run and call one of our neighbours*.’”

Phiri’s pastor arrived and called the police, who took her to Bapong Community Health Centre. There, Phiri was unable to receive care because essential medicines as well as Sexual Assault Kits were out of stock.

“This was before the Kgomotso Care Centre was established here, so the police sent me to Brits Hospital instead, where I was given medicine to prevent HIV and sexually transmitted infections, and examined by a forensic nurse,” Phiri recalls.

She returned several times for follow-up medical care and counselling.

“A lot of women do not go to the clinic after being raped because they don’t see any mark on their body, but I would be dead today if it wasn’t for the counselling I received after I was raped - I would’ve killed myself. We need to be able to get these services as women, and we need to use them,” Phiri says.

*Not her real name

** Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has been working with the North West Provincial Department of Health since 2015 to capacitate designated facilities on the platinum belt as ‘Kgomotso Care Centres’, providing a complete essential package of medical and clinical forensic services to survivors of sexual violence.

IMAGE CODES: MSF213442; MSF173343; MSF213416

[3] For more than 27 years Poppy Makgobatlou endured physical and mental abuse at the hands of her husband. She stayed with him because “in our culture, we respect the wishes of our parents, and my mother felt it would humiliate her if I left him”. Makgobatlou’s sister passed away in 2014, and when her mother fell ill a few months later, “things started to get out of control in my life.”

Her husband began removing items from the house one by one – where he was taking their things she did not know.

“He would just come and go, and when he was home he would fight me. He broke my shoulder, and the doctors tell me it is still broken.”

In 2015 Makgobatlou lost her brother.

“I remember what hurt the most, besides the beatings, was taking my brother to the hospital on the Saturday, and my husband was nowhere to be found. He came back home on the Monday, but only to ask for my wedding ring. I told him I did not know where it was, and when he left the house he said he was going to kill me when he returned. Around 2pm I received a call from the hospital to say that my brother had passed on - they wanted to know which mortuary they should take his body to,” she recalls.

After her brother’s funeral Makgobatlou lived with her sister’s two daughters for a time, unable to face her home. She received a summons for divorce from the Sherriff of the court, and learned that her husband was living with another woman. She received a divorce decree on the same day as her nieces kicked her out. Earlier in the week on the streets of Boitekong she had met a healthcare worker from Doctors Without Borders, who had told her about the Kgomotso Care Centre (KCC) at Boitekong Community Health Centre. With nowhere else to turn Makgobatlou borrowed R20, and caught a taxi to the KCC, where she was counseled and then transported to the Grace Help Centre near Mooinooi, which provides shelter for vulnerable women and children.

“What I liked about the KCC counselors is that they did not dump me. Even now they visit if they are in the area. I can feel that I am strong now, and ready to leave the shelter. I have no money but I do not need much – I want to know what it is like to live on my own in a little *mokhukhu* [shack], with just one plate and one cup – that will be fine for me,” she says

Asked if she would like her name to be changed to preserve her anonymity, Makgobatlou emphatically says, “No!”

“If an abused woman hears my story, I want them to know that I, Poppy Makgobatlou, used to hide my problems, but it kills you from inside to do that. You must speak out.”

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IMAGE CODES: MSF213418; MSF213421; MSF213422 ; MSF213439

[4] “I had an incident in my 20s which caused me to develop anger, and ruined my life,” says Eli Kgswane*, a former policeman. His car broke down one off-duty night. A car stopped, and the three female passengers offered to drive him into town. Once inside, the women overpowered and sexually abused Kgswane, who was 21 at the time.

“When I reported the incident I was laughed at. Not long after that I had a stroke, and I lost my job because I could no longer walk properly. For years after I was *galefele* – angry.”

Seated in the rooms of the Kgomotso Care Centre (KCC) at Bapong Community Health Centre, Kgswane speaks slowly, his voice deep and calm. He pauses a while, before saying, “I almost killed a person. I took a gun while angry, and if it wasn’t for my father stopping me I would have killed a person on that day.” His family suggested that he seek help but Kgswane did not know where to turn. When a KCC was established in Bapong he walked in and met Thabo, a counselor employed by Doctors Without Borders.

“After the first session I still felt anger. After the second session he gave me some exercises to do and after doing them I started to feel relief in my soul. After the third session I had changed completely and by the end of the fourth session I felt healed,” Kgswane says.

“I don’t know what to tell you – for a few years I lost hope in life but today my anger towards women is gone. I want to tell men who have experienced what I have that there is hope. A man and a woman are equal in their suffering if they experience this - the burden is the same, and you need help, before you do something you will regret,” he warns, before imploring male survivors of sexual violence to, “find a KCC - there is help for you there.”

*Not his real name

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IMAGE CODES: MSF213403; MSF213411; MSF213410; MSF213414 ; MSF213411