

From One to All

'People think I am the only one suffering from the physical, verbal and psychological violence my husband inflicted on me, but my children are suffering more'

Evelyn Peters (not real name), a 40-year-old mother of four beautiful children aged eight, six, five and 10 months old. In 2014, she presented a long history of abuse in her marriage. She lived an abusive relationship and like most women in such circumstances, she lived on hoping things will be better while occasionally taking the blame for her misfortunes.

That did not change her situation.

She had occasionally *been* forced to leave the matrimonial home in the hope that the space between them will trigger a rethink. However, after the birth of her fourth child, and as the abuses intensified, she had no option but to leave for good.

"The abuse was too much for me as he will beat me to the point of stripping me naked and chase me out of the house, I always felt humiliated and ashamed of myself and I didn't want to leave my

Gender Based Violence affects the victims directly, but there are secondary victims; children. These children who watch the violence begin to think it is normal to hit a woman

children. I continued to endure the violence because of my children.'

Her marriage for 10 years has brought four beautiful children along with side pain, anguish and tears. Evelyn, eventually left the location of abuse to a "safe" place, but her children are not spared from the abuse, especially her 8-year old son. The mother and children's right to dignity is denied pointing to a need for their protection from physical and mental abuses including torture and bad treatment.

Evelyn's *decision to move away from the abuse led to the father of her children* forcefully taking custody of all four children refusing to allow them join their mother. He denies her access to her children either in his house or at public places. She is in despair and concerned about her children.

"I don't know what is happening to my children, I have not seen them, except for the pictures of bruises and injuries inflicted on my son's body by his father's girlfriend. The children did not do anything to go through the barbaric torture, it is unfair, that was why previously, despite

the violence on me, I stayed to protect my children'

Her 8-year-old son is living in fear. He is ashamed to remove his clothes to play football like every other kid for fear of being asked lots of questions *about the scars on his back*. Some of his friends *who* have seen the bruises and injuries have ridiculed him, *while others expressed sincere sympathy*. He has missed school severally, finds it

The low number of reportage and capacity to seek redress accounts in part for the impunity GBV offenders. When a GBV survivor goes through the trauma of reporting abuses but fails to get justice, the resulting pain and desperation can best be imagined

difficult to concentrate in school when present; this has increased his *poor performance* in subjects he used to love and excel in. His leg has been broken, his entire back and head is severely scarred.

The natural urge of a mother to protect her children and especially rescue her 8-year old son from extreme physical abuse has again sent Evelyn seeking help. She is going from pillar to post pleading for intervention before the worst happens to her or her son. The extent of her son's physical and mental injuries is severely affecting Evelyn who has to leave her livelihood to see help for the custody of her children.

Meanwhile, protecting women and children from ALL forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) does not end in only resolving the problems of the Evelyns' in our society. Women also need to protect their children from becoming secondary victims who could grow thinking that the use of violence is a legitimate means to achieving their aims. If risk that, then the effect of GBV on the family and in our society would become a vicious circle.

The need for legislations and other support mechanisms cannot be over-emphasised. We ALL have a stake either as survivors or response actors.

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