

Observer

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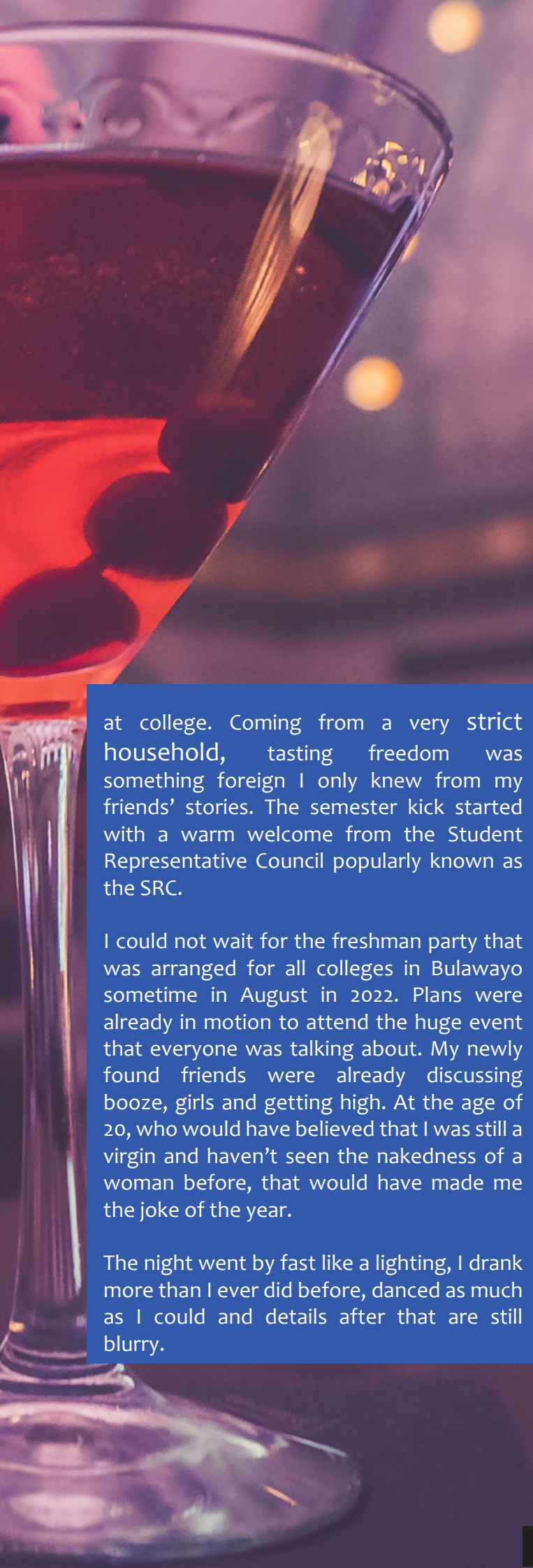
Fresh man party demons and the HIV snare

Enrolling at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) as a first-year student felt like an exhilarating rollercoaster until the freshman party demons caught up with me.

A freshman party is a celebration party hosted at colleges on different occasions and calendars across the country to welcome first-year students who will be setting foot at a tertiary institution for the first time. The fantasy of tasting freedom and being in charge of my own life made me so heavily invested in starting life

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at college. Coming from a very strict household, tasting freedom was something foreign I only knew from my friends' stories. The semester kick started with a warm welcome from the Student Representative Council popularly known as the SRC.

I could not wait for the freshman party that was arranged for all colleges in Bulawayo sometime in August in 2022. Plans were already in motion to attend the huge event that everyone was talking about. My newly found friends were already discussing booze, girls and getting high. At the age of 20, who would have believed that I was still a virgin and haven't seen the nakedness of a woman before, that would have made me the joke of the year.

The night went by fast like a lighting, I drank more than I ever did before, danced as much as I could and details after that are still blurry.

I woke up late the next morning with a note on my side written "take those PEP pills." I was totally clueless what those were thus I just squashed the paper and threw it in the bin unbothered. Later in the day a screenshot circulated in WhatsApp groups which I am a member. The contents of the letter described similarly a night I just had, not that I remembered all of it. The lady expressed her deep concern over having slept with a guy without protection at the freshman party despite her being HIV positive and not disclosing to the sexual partner due to fear of being judged. The last sentence that took me off my feet was the mention of the PEP pills that she left by the side of the bed. I was in denial as I thought how could a fresh looking yellow born like her have HIV?

Coming from a traditional household where sex talk was a taboo, you will understand my ignorance towards sex related matters. I just wished the world could swallow me right there and then, all I saw in front of me was the end of my future and life. I quickly snapped out of the shock and remembered I saw an advert of a peer educator's group which talked about Sexual Reproductive Health issues of young people. Till today, I'm grateful that movements like peer education exists at tertiary institutions as they make sure that young people graduate alive. I got sensitized on what PEP was and its purpose, and I was also given a referral slip that made sure I got the pills at free of charge. I was administered under PEP pills for 28 days in order to prevent me from contracting HIV.

I joined peer education after my ordeal and pledged to also ensure that I will disseminate SRHR information to my peers so that they make informed decisions. My experience and the information I acquired from peer education made me realize that as young people we have low perception risk and that has caused a huge dent in young people's SRH as we visually diagnose HIV. The life lesson I took with me and always passing on to my peers is never to allow social conformity and peer pressure to control your decisions. Be in charge of your health. Be a responsible person.

If you are in a relationship, normalize knowing your partners status, use condoms consistently and correctly.

Written by: Honest Sibanda

My life story as a TB survivor...



I have always wanted to be a medical doctor. Throughout my Ordinary Levels in Kadoma, I consistently excelled in science subjects. I was one of the top students in my class. To be honest, the only person I could consider a competitor was my best friend. Prior to 2013, I had never been admitted to a hospital.

In June of 2013, I became ill. I was in form three. It began with a cold, then severe coughing, a high fever, and night sweats. Until that point, I had never felt particularly ill. I began to lose weight. Schools opened, but I couldn't attend because my condition was deteriorating.

My father was a devout Christian. I'm writing in the past tense because he's now with the creator. He drove me to the neighbourhood "Mapostori." There was this man of God known as "Khonapho Khonapho" on the street. He got this name from the locals because of how he operates. He heals right there. My father took me there because he believed it was a spiritual problem rather than a medical one. He instructed my father to purchase eggs, milk, and other items before praying and giving me instructions and a stone to place in my drinking and bathing water.

I was getting worse and worse with no improvement. More weight loss and night sweats I finally went to the hospital and was tested for Tuberculosis, but the results were negative. They also performed a chest x-ray because doctors were unable to determine the source of the problem. I was then admitted to the hospital, and I recall being treated for Pneumonia on the first day. The second day arrives, and the other doctor diagnoses Malaria.

I then began Malaria treatment. I've never had so many injections as that time, to the point where my skin began to change colour.

I was discharged and returned home, but there was no improvement; in fact, I was getting worse. My Aunt contacted this other doctor, who then suggested that I be given Tuberculosis treatment as a trial and error. I began to recover a few weeks after the trial and error. I returned to school in 2014, and because of how science subjects are taught in government schools, I fell far behind, so I enrolled in commercial subjects at A'level and passed with flying colours. That is when I fell in love with accounting. After completing my A'level, I pursued a degree in accounting.

Tuberculosis is spread from person to person through the air. When someone with Tuberculosis disease of the lungs or throat coughs, speaks, laughs, sings, or sneezes, Tuberculosis germs are passed through the air. Anyone in close proximity to a sick person with Tuberculosis can breathe Tuberculosis germs into their lungs.

What I learned from my experience is that, without treatment, Tuberculosis can be fatal. Untreated active disease typically affects your lungs, but it can affect other parts of your body, as well. TUBERCULOSIS disease can also be treated with medication. If you have Tuberculosis, it is critical that you finish the medication and take the drugs exactly as directed. You may become ill again if you stop taking the drugs too soon. If the drugs are not taken properly, the germs that are still alive may become difficult to treat with those drugs.

*Story by Tinashe Banda
National Coordinating Committee*

INVEST TO END TB.

SAVE LIVES.



#WorldTBDAY #EndTB
#InvestToEndTB



Stop TB Partnership

hosted by
UNOPS



CRAFT FESTIVAL

Contestants sent revellers to the moon.

The Swedish Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Her Excellency, Asa Pehrson was among thousands of people who thronged the Harare Gardens in October courtesy of the inaugural Creative Reproductive health Arts for Transformation (CRAFT) festival which sent revellers to the moon.

A total of 36 contestants loaded with artistic talent converted their artistry artwork into a voice of reason against gender-based violence, child marriages, teenage pregnancies, poor access to HIV and STIs preventive tools, and various forms of sexual reproductive and rights (SRHR) violations.

The contestants were performing in various categories which included, drama, poetry, music and public speaking. The festival remains an important platform that afford young people a conducive space to educate themselves and communities on sexual reproductive health issues while showcasing their talent.

“We are here to celebrate talent, passion, and the young people’s desire to participate in processes that contribute to their wellbeing,” Ambassador Pehrson said.

“The inclusivity that is being demonstrated here is what Sweden stands for. Sweden believes that there can never be true transformation toward gender equality, respect for democracy and human rights including Sexual Reproductive Health Rights without inclusion of young people in their diversity,” she said.

She called on the participants to be proud of their achievements.

“Be proud for choosing to be torch bearers of positive health choices and behaviours and being ambassadors of health, gender, and human rights realization in Zimbabwe and beyond. “I am impressed with the performances I am seeing today. Your artistic work has power to re-shape today’s policies to speak to young people’s interests.”

The show was capped by scintillating performances from Alick Macheso, Freeman, Anita Jackson, and Enzo Ishal.



Disability is not inability



The Story of Macho Man

It's hard to explain what music does. Even those who aren't constantly surrounded by chords and choruses can't help but feel a need to groove when a catchy tune comes on.

Too often, musicians with disabilities find it hard to make it mainstream because of so many bottlenecks and deprivation of opportunities.

However, for Lee Chitsinge from Manicaland, who is living with a disability, the prospect of being a professional seemed too farfetched.

He thought he would not live to be behind the mic and churn out tune after tune. That was before SAYWHAT under the CHASE competition knocked on his doors. Macho Man Tingz, as he is popularly known as, entered the competition and won the music category.

His social commentary makes him one of the best performers at the CRAFT festival. The beauty of music is that it makes you feel without thinking, often triggering an emotional response before our brains kick in.

A tune starts and we inadvertently find ourselves nodding our heads and tapping our feet. Music can stir up feelings of joy, euphoria, anger, grief, sadness — it has that effect on people.

From tribal beats to house anthems, EDM to classical arias, music videos to operatic performances, it's a universal language that we speak all around the world.



Macho Man performing at CRAFT Festival



Sanitary pad drought continues, hopes alive for 2023

Despite Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube allocating ZW\$1.23 billion towards provision of free sanitary wear in the 2022 national budget, the rural based girl child expected to have benefited from this share, is still in sanitary pad drought.

This was revealed by the 3rd Report of the Portfolio Committee on Primary and Secondary Education on the Provision of Sanitary Wear in Rural Schools presented in Parliament recently.

The free sanitary wear program started about three years ago following concerted efforts by legislators, especially Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga (now ambassador to Sweden), and Jasmine Toffa, among others.

However, as the year comes to an end, it is sad to note that girls in rural areas are still depending on unhygienic measures such as cow dungs to manage their menstrual health.

This is because the sanitary wear funded by the government is not reaching to all rural schools and in other remotest parts of Zimbabwe like Mberengwa, Nkayi, to just mention a few.

In those schools where the program has reached, they have not received adequate allocations.

According to the Report, Mutimuri Primary School only received a single box of disposable sanitary wear with 10 packs (120 units of pads) since 2019 while they had not received anything for the 2022 year.

In Rushinga District, Kasika Primary School had only received a few dis-posable pads and fabrics of sanitary wear material which were yet to be sewn.

In Mutoko District, only two schools had received reusable pads from the government while most schools had not received anything except from the school development partners.

Some schools like Katasa, Chakohwa and Mazungunye had never benefitted from the government sanitary wear project to schools.

It paints a bad picture that the distribution of sanitary wear to rural schools remains a major challenge across all provinces in Zimbabwe, despite the allocation of the funds.

Proportional Representation legislator Paurina Mpariwa in her debate on the matter, said she expected an improvement in 2023 national budget resource distribution. She said this creates room and an opportunity for legislators to fine tune the program and to correct past shortcomings. "I am happy that the report has come through before the budget has been presented and debated which then affects in planning that if anything needs to be addressed, this is the opportunity because we can continue talking of sanitary wear that it is not available in rural areas as children are using cow dung.

"This past week, it was mentioned that children are using cow dung and unclean methods to deal with menstruation. This has been investigated and there is no sanitary wear and if there is no sanitary wear, a child can use anything.

"It is embarrassing because the child does not have the requisite sanitary wear to use during menstrual period. It also affects their education and performance in class," she said.

Sanitary pads are beyond the reach of many rural girls due to high prices being charged by retail supermarkets.

It is believed that there are many young girls who are missing school because they have no sanitary wear to use during menstruation.

This disadvantages the girl child on many fronts. Some may miss class for a week while others miss a couple of days. However, it is difficult to recover the time lost.

About the author: Gracious Nyathi is a journalism and media student at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST). She is reachable on 0775882773.



Covid-19 saved my life

Nothing has touched my heart this far than the trends in the print and online media. Stories of rape are being published as if it's an art gallery exhibition. Surely, those that read and us victims of such ordeals see things differently.

I was raised by a single mom who went all out to ensure that I get quality education. Things were not easy, but, well I was set to start my four-year college experience. Disheartening news of my mom's passing had seen my world crumbling. It was just me and her. Why would an accident rob me off my best friend, she was all I had? As we laid her to rest, the long-lost father showed up. I last saw him when I was at primary school.

A wolf comes dressed in a lamb's skin for sure. Unable to pay for my tuition, he moved me to his rural home, where I spent a couple of months trying to put my life back together. It happened that his maid left on questionable circumstances and was asked to come fill the gap for some time till he found a new one. A process that took longer than expected, I performed all the household duties. Attempts of finding a main were abandoned.

He used to come home late from work, the kids will be asleep and so will I be. He would demand for a hot meal which I would warm up while he waits for it in his bedroom. The unfortunate night came, had just turned 19. He came late as usual, but this time he had a gift bag in his hand. He never asked for food that night. "This is yours." I thanked him with a joyful heart. I warmed up his food as usual, as I served him, he asked, "Have you tried it on?" I just smiled, he saw I had not and asked me to. I did as he asked. I loved it; the dress was beautiful.

"Ngiyabonga baba sihle," (Thank you dad, this is nice). I said after trying it on. "Ngena phela mbone, (come

inside so that I see how it fits you." In a moment, I replied. I went back to put it on, only to find him standing by the door half-naked. He had planned to rape me and I fell for it. I tried to put him off but he overpowered me. I could feel his weight added by his bell. I was hopeless. He was stinky as expected of a motor mechanic.

I was scared to speak out more so after his successive death threats. I had no one to tell. I spent all the time with the kids at home. Would tremble in fear when someone knocks at the door thinking it's him. Time went by, yet I felt like it stood still. Every night since February 2020, he continued to rape me. I lost the zeal to fight and only prayed that this cup would pass. Grandma asked for the kids towards the end of February. We were left all alone, yet still, he never stopped.

COVID-19 answered my silent prayers. The pandemic quickly spread in the country and he caught it, and he passed it on to me. We were hospitalised. When I recovered and left quarantine for home. My neighbour came to offer her condolences, was puzzled at first. When she left. Tears rolled down my eyes in relief. COVID had taken him to the grave. God had put me out of my misery.

As rape headlines keep surfacing, I wonder how many young girls and women need to be raped till the government takes drastic measures against this animality. Homes are supposed to be safe havens for everyone, where do we turn to when the people, we trust the most are the ones that take advantage of us? Surely, children, girls and women need a saviour.

Written by: Nicole Moyo.

Girl child protection is everyone's responsibility.



Protecting girls from abuse by older males will likely take more than just enacting laws and coming up with colourful and grammatically appetizing position papers. Laws such as the Marriage Act have been enacted, various judgments passed setting the age of consent to 18 years to set precedence, but it would appear nothing is working, at least for the vulnerable girls.

Even after these actions have been taken, cases of child abuse with the girl child suffering the most continue to be recorded beyond Apostolic sect which has been traditionally accused of abusing young girls' sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR).

Recently we have had a spike of child pregnancy cases with girls as young as eight (8) who got impregnated as a result of rape.

There is need for political will now more than ever. Politicians need to put the same effort they use in drumming up for political support in election times to fight for the protection of girls.

In fact, we call upon politicians that as we go into the 2023 general election period, issues of child marriages, teen pregnancies and child abuse should take prominence in their election manifestos.

Anti-child marriage and all forms of abuse messages should top the agenda at all gatherings and forums including political rallies.

There will be a huge impact because most political activists and party supporters often listen and do what their leaders tell them to do.

Just allowing pregnant girls to go back to school is not the ultimate solution to protecting girls, it's not enough as an effort or a solution. There is more scope in protecting them from getting pregnant than allowing them to continue school.

Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Health and Child Care chairperson Honourable Ruth Labode also highlighted the continued abuse of young girls. She also highlighted that measures that have been put in place are literally failing.

"... the nation has tried, parents have tried and you have even brought a Bill, the Medical Amendment Bill saying

you will arrest parents who do not take kids to institutions for treatment.

"While we want to believe that we can control this thing, it has run away from us and we cannot control it.

"We think we can do a church business to deal with this matter; it has run out, it has become a scourge, it is an epidemic, it needs men and women to stand otherwise we are losing our children," she said.

Honourable Vice President and Health Minister Constantino Chiwenga told Parliament his ministry had tried its best, and urged legislators to educate their constituencies on the issue.

"When it comes to immoralities in society, this is no longer what we treat as Ministry of Health and Child Care. We come up with policies and that is why we presented in this August House Mr. Speaker, that we cannot have the issue of having children of 12 to 13 years going on their own to get contraceptives.

"We are on record saying this cannot be accepted, neither can we have children to say they consented when they are 16 years; we also said that is not acceptable. We go to majority age; 18 years.

"Therefore, as the law, we have pushed, and this August House agreed. It is now a law that below 18 years, they are all children, and this is what we must stick to. Now comes the issue of children being abused at school or lack of moralities, children start having children-based families; that cannot be accepted; it is not morally correct.

"So, we are starting from this August House that we all have constituencies; we must use the structures from the kraalhead to the headmen, councillors, to make sure that people are educated. It is not for the Government to try alone, because these children have parents. They have both the father and mother in the house. What are we doing as parents?"

Profile: Karen Nyeraurombo is a Media and Society Studies student at the Midlands State University (MSU). She is reachable on 0778914123.



MPs at the NSYC 2022

Youths take on MPs over sexual health

Zimbabwean youths have challenged parliamentarians to up their game by initiating legislation that protect the girl child against perpetrators of sexual rights violations.

This was revealed during the 12th edition of the National Students and Youth conference in Harare where scores of youths unanimously agreed that there is need for the nation to take sexual health matters seriously.

The call came after a nine-year old Tsholotsho girl fell pregnant and is currently admitted at a Bulawayo hospital.

The youths said it is high time the Termination of Pregnancy Act be rectified.

“Children under the age of 18 are not allowed to access reproductive health services without parental or guardian consent yet young people as young as nine (9) are being impregnated. The conditions under which pregnancy can be terminated need to be relooked at. We are losing young girls through maternal death. What is the parliament doing to rectify the Termination of Pregnancy Act,?” one delegate asked.

The conference organised by the Students And Youth Working on Reproductive Health (SAYWHAT) was running under the theme, This is our time: Establishing youth friendly health centers and inclusive education for all.

Speaking during the same meeting, national coordinating committee member, Chengeto Pasipanodya said there was need to legalise abortion as teenagers are the most affected by early pregnancies.

It was also attended by delegates from regional countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa, among other countries.



Ashley SHRH Defender engaging with MPs at NYSC 2022



Toxicity in Families affecting mental health of children

Families can be very toxic, especially to the girl child. Toxicity comes in different forms, it could be through social grooming, jealous relatives, feuding relatives using children as weapons to fight their battles or aunties who use words and witchcraft to curse children of their brothers because they don't get along with their sisters-in-law. Toxicity in families affects the mental health of children causing untold generational pain and suffering for those affected.

Social grooming is the preparation of a child to become a responsible adult in the eyes of society. Fair and fine, but for an African girl, it's more of a rehearsal for wife roles. A typical African girl is taught to clean, cook and look after a husband at an early age. It is drilled in her mind by society that marriage is an achievement and anything else doesn't matter or it's not a priority. Young girls grow up with an inferiority complex, which translates into them getting into abusive and exploitative relationships, that leaves them spiritually, mentally, and physically damaged.



It is common for uncles to be jealous of their nieces, during lobola negotiations especially if the uncles' children are not lucky in love. Uncles have been known to try and spoil the lobola day for their nieces by being difficult and unyielding during lobola negotiations. This has led to the groom's family, later, being hostile towards the bride because of the treatment they would have received from their in-laws. The lobola ceremony is supposed to be a uniting event between two families, but certain relatives have been known to turn it into a chaotic event of extortion, the commodification of a girl child, and human trafficking. The consequences of this are dire to a woman, she will bear the full brunt of an angry husband and his family.



It is common in certain families to use children to fight battles, resulting in generational hatred and wars between families. Children and grandchildren inheriting their parents' feuds and continuing a culture of hatred and toxicity are detrimental to the mental health of children. Girls have been accused of carrying `muti` given by their parents to bewitch the relative they are visiting. They have been caught in the middle of family feuds resulting in untold mental health challenges in the future.

Black magic is part of African tradition. Some African families are known for cursing each other and placing spells on family members. Girls have been known to suffer infertility or failed marriages all attributed to some angry auntie or uncle putting an evil spell on them. Words have power. Words can change the destiny of a child. Positive words can build a person, negative words can destroy a person and his or her destiny. Some African relatives especially aunties have been known to use negative words toward children's relatives.

Toxicity in families is real. Girl children have borne the brunt of it. They have been turned into maids under the guise of social grooming. Their marriage dreams have been curtailed by jealous relatives during lobola negotiations. Words have been spoken over their lives by angry relatives that have changed their destiny and caused untold pain and suffering throughout their adult life. The mental health of children at home matters. It is their right to grow up in a toxic-free environment. Parents and the government through legislative intervention have the responsibility of ensuring children are protected from toxic situations.

About the Author

Tandie Sarah Sibanda is a 13-year-old form 1 female student at Cowdray Park Secondary School in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She is passionate about the empowerment of girls and women. She is a member of Amplifying girls' voices through digital art (A fun, exciting & educative hub which helps empower young girls & women against any form of abuse through the creation of content) and also she is a peer educator under GOLD (Generation of leaders Discovered) a peer education programme for adolescents in schools. She can be reached on 0773565083 or 0786078771 email address sibandatj@gmail.com or tandiessibanda@gmail.com

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND LOVE

Love should not hurt. It is ironic, however, that most people in our society are victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in the name of love. A question often asked is "why didn't she leave?" Isn't it rather strange that our society anticipates that when people have been abused, the first thing they should do is get out of the relationship? But they don't ask what the perpetrator has done or what damage has been caused to the victim. It is now rather normal to face GBV. Is leaving the solution, and is it possible, especially if one is in an intimate relationship?

GBV is any harmful act involving physical, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse directed at an individual because of their gender. Unfortunately, many people, particularly young women, misinterpret GBV as a form of love. Those searching for love are told by society that "if he doesn't shout at you, cheat on you, or hit you, then you haven't been loved yet." Pain and hurt have been normalized so much in our society to an extent that people no longer differentiate between love and abuse. Strange society, strange morals, right?

Susan (not her real name) obviously mistook GBV for love. She was a first-year student at a local university, dating Chris, a third-year student at the same college. These two were the IT couple, an inspiration to all of us searching for Mr. and Mrs. Right. She would tell me about her happy moments, and I would console her when she was sad. Susan gave away her virginity as a token of appreciation for the love her boyfriend showed her.

As time progressed, Susan started noticing changes in Chris' behavior and confronted him about them. In arguments, Chris would push her; there was a time he pushed her and her head hit the wall. He apologized, said he did not mean to hurt her, and promised to never do it again. With love, Susan forgave him. Little did she know that her nightmare had just begun.





During the months that followed, pushes turned to slaps, and the slaps to punches. Hitting Susan became Chris' way of ending any argument, from cheating accusations to mere questioning of WhatsApp texts. The violence was always followed by a "honeymoon period" that always left Susan confused. When she told her friends about this outrageous behavior, they told her she was exaggerating and overthinking. "All this pain and hurt is normal in an intimate partner relationship, and it shows how strong your love is," Chipso once said while enjoying a box of pizza in our room. "No whirlwind is strong enough to separate you two."

The duo would break up and then make up. Each time Susan would leave him, Chris would start feeling emotional and apologetic for his bad conduct. He would become the sweetheart every girl dream of. Susan would welcome the apparent changes and promises made. The unfortunate day arrived, and she found Chris making out with some girl in his room. He later came to make amends that night, but Susan wouldn't have it. She had had enough. She vowed to move on and be free from such torment. In anger, Chris beat Susan. I tried helping, but he was just way too strong. He held her by her neck and hit her head against our bunkbed. She breathed her last that night. Noticing what he had done, Chris disappeared that evening, and we found his boy the next day hanging in the bushes.

We have lost way too much to violence and suicide. Let's spread the GBV message to all corners of the world until our communities are safe. A GBV-free society is possible and attainable. Report all cases of abuse when you are faced with one or when you know someone going through it. I would have done the same if I knew. Today, I know better.
Written by: Ruvimbo .N. Mutsago

2022 in pictures



SGBV Campaign Hopley



Enzo Ishall CRAFT Festival



SARSYC Malawi 2022



Dance performance CRAFT



Drama performance CRAFT



NSYC 2022



MSU SASI Debate champions



CRAFT festival 2022



Chase participants



Quiz participants with the Swedish Ambassador



Service Access Hopley Campaign



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Call 577 to report Child Abuse.

Children's safety is everyone's responsibility.

What are you doing to protect them?

