

# POSITIVELY WOMEN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2002

A woman's silhouette is shown in profile, looking out a window. The window looks out onto a brick building with many windows. The scene is dimly lit, with the woman's face and neck in shadow.

## living in the shadow

HIV and domestic violence

what's on at PW

Cate's column

your say

Patience's story prompted this issue's focus on Domestic Violence. It is an inspiring testimony to her strength and love for her daughter who gave her the will to survive.

no

# I am free

BY PATIENCE



It was a wedding to remember. There were lots of smiles on the bride and groom's faces, it was my wedding, little did I know what lay ahead for me.

My name is Patience. I got married to the love of my life – or so I thought. I gave up my schooling in Africa and came to the UK to be with my husband. I think I became pregnant that week I arrived in London, I was over the moon with the news – the marriage was all I ever wanted it to be, it was perfect.

Life went on until that fateful day I went for a routine antenatal check up. I was called back into the hospital and there was a man waiting for me, he had a kind face. He said "We have found something in the HIV blood test, you are positive" – I passed out. When I woke up they took me to the HIV unit, all I kept saying was "What will happen to my baby" – it was horrible.

I decided that I would keep my baby, but when I told my husband about the HIV the first words out of his mouth were that we should have an abortion – I said no. His blood was

taken and the results came a week later. Before we left for the clinic we prayed. I asked God to give him a negative result – that my baby would not be alone – his result came back negative and everything changed.

He kept going on about an abortion, life was a living hell, it was an everyday thing. He would not sleep in the same bed with me and when he did would jump or ask me to move away if I mistakenly touched any part of his body.

He wouldn't come home and started having an affair, when he did come home he wouldn't talk to me. When I tried to involve him in our child's life he would say something nasty. Some words I refuse to repeat because they are so hurtful. It was getting worse every day, I kept crying and praying for death to come but it did not. He refused to give me any money for shopping so I was home alone and hungry. It was sad because back home I worked and had my own money.

At 28 weeks into my pregnancy I went to the hospital for my

check up, I was immediately admitted with high blood pressure and the doctors had to deliver the baby, I went into the operating theatre scared and alone. The doctors were wonderful and my daughter was successfully delivered.

Now the physical abuse started in my home. One day he came into the room where I was feeding the baby. When I refused to put her down he held me by the throat and started choking me. Then came the punches, on my head, face, my tummy, it was everywhere.

The next day I was packed and ready to return home to Africa. He panicked and knelt down and begged, saying "I don't know what got into me, we will go for counselling" I forgave him and stayed. I went to the GP and returned thinking "From now on it will be OK"

I must have been dreaming to think that because the abuse got worse. I was raped anytime I said no to sex and beaten up for no reason. It was the same thing over and over again. I kept hoping for a change in him and praying for things to

# more,

improve but all in vain.

My daughter had her final HIV tests and they were all negative. I was over the moon and although my husband was happy he kept making comments that made me cry. Meanwhile the violence continued, I was taken to A&E for head injuries after he had punched me and I passed out. I could tell no one because he kept threatening to tell friends and family abroad about my HIV status so I remained with him and the abuse.

I was now referred to the HIV mental health team because it clearly showed that I was emotionally depressed. A councillor came to my home, he advised me to go for support. I went to Body and Soul HIV support group, it made me strong and every time I went I grew stronger and happier with myself. I started volunteering at Positively Women once a week and it was the best, the people were friendly and nice and I still work there. My husband did not like it and refused to let me take my daughter but I would not let him bring me down.

Then came the fateful day, I was on the phone to a friend and he got angry. He took the phone, hung it up and threw it at me. I was furious – at my wits end. I told him I didn't want to continue with the marriage any longer. I wanted out. He starting

choking me telling me who gave me the right to not be married to him. I tried defending myself but he punched me in the face, banged my head against the wall and all was dark.

When I opened my eyes I couldn't see out of one of them, I was bleeding out of every part of my face. I begged for the phone to call the emergency services but he refused. He just stood there and said I should die. I later called them and was taken to hospital.

I had several surgeries to give me back my sight and I still have more to be done. The police are involved – I am pressing charges. I was really surprised by the response from the police. They were really worried about me and my safety.

My husband has been charged with grievous bodily harm (GBH) and I have started divorce proceedings. I am just sorry that I started too late, I almost lost my life for no reason and I put my daughter in an unhealthy situation. No more, I am free, I do not care if he tells the whole world about my HIV status, I am happy.

He came begging for me to drop the charges, threatened me and I got a restraining order. I do not know what he is doing now and I don't care, as long as he stays away from me. Never again will I stand for that. It might take me



**He said I love you  
And the words slipped  
gently around my neck  
and strangled me.**

*by Cate Jacobs*

a long time to recover fully, but I know I will be OK now. Just recently I have enrolled on a full time university course again.

The sad thing about all of this is that I was not abused because of my health – he is a sick man. I have found out that he has also abused other women before me. Hopefully this time he will be convicted and stopped before he finally kills an innocent person. **P W**

**See page 2 for information  
on what to do if you are  
experiencing Domestic  
Violence.**

# DOMESTIC

**Julie Reynolds worked at Positively Women for 7 years both in the client services and development teams. She is currently the Public Awareness worker at Scottish Women's Aid.**

## the facts

The term 'Domestic Violence' describes persistent ongoing behaviour ranging from:

**Mental and emotional abuse:**

Verbal abuse, threats and intimidation, manipulative behaviour, withholding money and other types of controlling behaviour such as isolation from family and friends.

**Sexual abuse:** Acts which humiliate and are perpetrated against your will, including sexual assault and rape.

**Physical abuse:** Assaults and physical attack and even murder.

The vast majority of domestic violence and the most severe and chronic incidents are perpetrated by men against women and their children (around 96%). Around one in four women will experience domestic violence at some point in their lives.

As with a HIV diagnosis those who experience domestic violence often keep it to themselves – shamed and embarrassed by what is happening to them, unsure of where they can go and what help they can get, fearful of doing anything which might make the situation worse. Like HIV, people may blame and judge she must

have done something to deserve it – or she was asking for it. Women do not stay because they deserve or enjoy the abuse. They stay because they hope things will get better and they stay because they live with stigma and in fear.

At the beginning of most relationships, violence is rarely shown. However as the relationship develops there may be an increase in aggressive behaviour which may include angry outbursts, blaming and arguing. This may go on to physical violence include hitting, punching, smacking, pushing, hair pulling etc. A calm stage can follow where there is no violence. During this time the abuser may be loving, taking some responsibility for the behaviour. They may beg for forgiveness, promise not to do it again and promise to change.

Sometimes the abuser will blame other factors i.e. the violence is due to drug or alcohol abuse or because of their social or economic background. None of these are the cause of domestic violence, they are factors that are used to shift the responsibility of the violence away from the abuser themselves. The abuser makes a

# VIOLENCE

## the facts

choice about his violence. It is a choice made by some men to exercise power and control over their partner.

Many people think that domestic violence is an issue that only affects women, yet in 90 per cent of cases, children are in the same or next room while violence is going on. They may be hurt trying to stop the violence, or may be the target of abuse themselves. Even if they are not physically harmed, children may suffer lasting emotional and psychological damage as a result of witnessing violence. They may be encouraged to take part or be threatened as a way of controlling the mother. Between 40 and 60 per cent of all domestic violence cases involve violence to children as well as the mother .

In extreme cases, domestic violence can lead to the death of the child or a parent.

Each year, 45% of female homicide victims are killed by present or former male partners compared to only 8% of male victims. On average, 2 women per week are killed in England and Wales by their partners/ex-partners, and half of the women

killed in Scotland are murdered by partners or ex-partners. Women are at greatest risk of being murdered at the point of separation or after leaving a violent partner.

Domestic violence often continues and may escalate in severity after separation. As many as one-third of women who leave refuges experience continued abuse and harassment from their ex-partners. Violence can also escalate at the time of pregnancy. 60% of 127 women resident in refuges in Northern Ireland experienced violence during pregnancy. 13% lost their babies as a result.

The role of women, the messages we receive, how we identify and value ourselves through relationships, unequal pay, under-representation at top levels in business, industry and government all play a part in maintaining the wider inequalities and power relations that exist through out society.

A survey of 1000 women in city centres in North England found that 1 in 8 women reported having been raped by their husbands or partners. Here in Scotland the Scottish Executive has taken the lead in the UK on

the issue of domestic abuse /violence. If we are to succeed in ending domestic violence we need to change the climate so that society becomes more aware of the problems associated with domestic violence.

We need to ensure that reporting incidents of violence is not a blame laying exercise and that there is support for women and their families experiencing abuse.

Laws which protect women from domestic violence, information, support and greater awareness are some of the key issues which must be forthcoming in helping a woman to emerge from a situation of violence, empowering her to make the decisions that she feels are right for both herself and her family. Women need to recognise that violence of any sort is a crime and that we do not have to accept it. It is our right to live with dignity and freedom from violence. **P W**

**See page 2 for information on what to do if you are experiencing Domestic Violence.**