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Original Article

Sexual Harassment, Abuse and Healing in East Africa.

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Sexual harassment is a serious problem in East Africa. Sexual harassment can occur where one person uses a position of authority to compel another person to engage in an otherwise unwanted sexual activity. Sexual harassment leaves inner wounds in a person that affect negatively their psychological and spiritual lives. In the context of Africa, often it is women who are the targets of sexual harassment but not always. This paper addresses one of the most pernicious violations of that trust. Not only in East Africa, but globally, children are traumatized by sexual abuse, harassment, and discriminatory behaviour at the hands of those on whom they rely for their well-being. In my ministry of teaching, giving motivational seminars and advising secondary school girls and boys in academic issues and in their process of growth through adolescent period, I personally have come across many similar cases. It provoked me to think about the problem. Therefore, in this paper I intend to address some of the issues of sexual harassment, give a brief explanation of what these experiences are, bring to awareness some of the causes, explore their impact on growth and development and propose some ways of enabling such victims to seek healing and integration.

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INTRODUCTION

Stella¹ was referred to Karibu Crisis Centre from a children's home when she was sixteen years old. She was born of a single mother who gave birth to her at the age of fifteen. When Stella was three years old her mother got married to a man who never wanted to see Stella. He therefore forced the mother to leave Stella behind with the aunt. The mother agreed to do so since she was looking for someone who could take care of her, and of course, she also was looking for some security. At such a tender age the mother opted to leave the daughter and for three years she never visited Stella. They lived in one of the biggest slums of Kenya, Kibera. When the daughter was seven years old, the mother decided to reunite. But Stella's stay with the mother was a painful and terrible experience because the stepfather started abusing her sexually and also threatened her not to tell anyone or else, he would kill her. The poor girl bore all the trauma without telling her mother. One night he sent both Stella and the mother out of the house and followed behind them. He grabbed Stella and took her by the road side, raped her and left her unconscious. Lucky enough she became conscious after some hours and gathered some strength and walked back home. She narrated the story to the mother; who too got embarrassed and traumatized by the incident. Stella was taken to Nairobi Women's Hospital where she received medication and counselling. When her condition got better the hospital administration took her to St. Marian, a home that takes care of abused and orphaned children. Stella spent most of her years in this home while schooling. When she joined high school, she decided to visit the mother and there, she met her cousin who introduced her to a man who again raped her and left her pregnant. This is when she was referred to Karibu Crisis Centre by the children's home.

Karibu Crisis Centre offered counselling, medication, temporary shelter for her until she

delivered, including prenatal and postnatal care. It was such a long journey for Stella to accept herself and her reality; it took months for her to begin to recognize her worth and dignity as a young mother. After a year of nursing her child, she went back to high school to complete her studies.

The saga of sexual harassment experienced by Stella is one among the many of such in East Africa. In my ministry of teaching, giving motivational seminars and advising secondary school girls and boys in academic issues and in their process of growth through adolescent period, I personally have come across many similar cases. It provoked me to think about the problem. Therefore, in this paper I intend to address some of the issues of sexual harassment, give a brief explanation of what these experiences are, bring to awareness some of the causes, explore their impact on growth and development and propose some ways of enabling such victims to seek healing and integration.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is a serious problem in East Africa. Sexual harassment could be "defined as physical contact and advances, a demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks and showing pornography and any unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature."² Verbal sexual harassment may consist in comments about body, clothing, sexual jokes, and remarks, teasing or demanding sexual favours. Non-verbal activities include insulting sounds, staring at someone's body, obscene gestures, and display of sexually suggestive or pornographic material. Physical sexual harassment consists of touching, pinching, brushing up or bumping against the body and sexual assault.

¹ Stella is not her real name. This incident was personally narrated to me by Sr. Bernadetta when she sought help to sponsor Stella for her studies.

² M. Scaria, "Inside an unsafe world," *Indian Currents* 17, no 4 (2005): 13-14.

The *Sexual Harassment of Women at their work Place* (Prevention) by Bill (2003) defines sexual harassment as follows:

*Sexual Harassment includes any avoidable sexual advances either verbal or through gestures or through use of sexually suggestive or pornographic material, and includes among others, whistling, sexually slanting and obscene remarks or jokes; comments about physical appearance, demands for sexual favours; threats, innuendoes; avoidable physical contacts, touching, patting, pinching; physical assaults and molestation of and towards women workers by their male colleagues or anyone who for the time being is in a position to sexually harass the woman.*³

Sexual harassment can occur where one person uses a position of authority to compel another person to engage in an otherwise unwanted sexual activity. For example, sexual harassment in the workplace might involve an employee being coerced into a sexual situation out of fear of being dismissed. Sexual harassment in education (in my observation, it is a serious problem in secondary and university education in East Africa) might involve a student submitting to the sexual advances of a person in authority in fear of being punished, for example by being given a failing grade.

Sexual harassment leaves inner wounds in a person that affect negatively their psychological and spiritual lives. In the context of Africa, often it is women who are the targets of sexual harassment but not always. Women too can sexually harass boys and men.⁴ In an interesting study Rutter caution on some of the behaviour in the area of sexuality which if not addressed appropriately can lead to sexual harassment. They are the following:

- *Boundaries*: are the limit we place in our relationship with others. "The sexual boundary is the line each of us draws around ourselves in regard to sending out or receiving sexual signals,

whether verbal or non-verbal".⁵ The capacity to judge the welcome or unwelcome nature of a sexual behaviour is of paramount importance to prevent sexual harassment. One needs to know what behaviour is acceptable and what is not. One needs to anticipate someone's reaction to his/her behaviour. Rutter suggests that a great deal of sexual harassment can be prevented if we can make accurate judgments about what another person's reaction to our behaviour will be.

- *Sexual fantasies*: are imaginations with sexual content. These come to a person unasked without regard to place, time or situation or they can be consciously created. At times one wonders whether we are normal with such erotic fantasies. Sexual fantasies can be both alluring and compelling. There seems to be a relationship between sexual fantasies and sexually harassing behaviour. From the inner world of the imagination a shift takes place to the outer world where the fantasized inner behaviour can become an outer reality at least in a covert form.⁶ Cultural, familial and peer group factors exert much influence on whether we give expression or not to what goes on in the inside of us. As sexual beings we need to learn to live with our sexual fantasies as they occur without giving them external behavioural expression, especially when they concern others. Education in this regard is needed especially since there is a lot of pornographic pictures that are easily available on the internet.
- *Flirting*: is a third type of behaviour which can evolve into sexual harassment. Flirting is a style of communication in which sexual messages are sent to another person as a way of ascertaining if the other is interested to move along in the same direction. Sexual interest is communicated to others in some disguised manner. Rutter speaks of a variety of ways communicating sexual interest:

³National Commission for Women, *Sexual Harassment of Women at their work place* (Prevention) Bill, 2003.

⁴ Sexual harassment is determined on who has power and money. It can be either man or woman. In the movie called "disclosure" this fact is proved by a lady boss assaulting a male employee into sex. The other movie is called "Doubt" here a

nun is harassing a priest not into sex but with false accusations that he defiles little boys and uses young sisters.

⁵ P. Rutter, *Sex, power and boundaries: Understanding and preventing sexual harassment* (New York: Bantam, 1996), 14.

⁶*Ibid.*, 15.

*Through different kinds of speaking, whether tone or voice or choice of words; through glances, facial expressions, and the management of the critical parameter of eye contact; through physical positioning; through timing, often expressed as holding a handshake for an extra moment, or by lingering just a bit longer when any particular social interaction is about to end; through pace of interaction; through phone calls, conversations, notes, cards, gifts, seminar arranged 'just running into's' or just about any way of initiating or sustaining communication.*⁷

These are not in themselves issues of sexual harassment; however, they have the potential to be and they test our skill in interpreting, making appropriate judgment and responding to what goes on in a relationship, whether personal and professional.

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

“Sexual abuse is when any person, adult, or child, forces, tricks, threatens, or coerces a child to have any kind of sexual contact with him/her. Showing children pornographic pictures or films, or telling them explicitly sexual stories can be a form of sexual abuse. Some children are forced or encouraged to have sexual intercourse with parents, uncles, grandparents, or friends of the family. Other children have sexual contact with strangers.”⁸

Child sexual abuse includes the following:

- An adult exposing his, or her genitals to a child or persuading the child to do the same;
- An adult touching a child's genitals or making the child touch the adult's genitalia;
- An adult involving a child in pornography which includes showing a child pornographic material;
- An adult having oral, vaginal or anal intercourse with a child;

- Any verbal or other sexual suggestion made to a child by an adult;
- An adult persuading child to engage in sexual activity among themselves;
- An adult inserting foreign objects into a child's body for his, or her, own sexual gratification.⁹

Some tend to put 18 as the age limit to demarcate child from adult in regard to abuse. Others lower it to 16. However, there is really no age limit for inflicting emotional wounds. When the abuse is perpetrated by a close family member, such as parent, a brother or sister, a grandparent, uncle or aunt, it becomes incest. Brother-sister incest is probably the most common form. Many children are also abused by parents. Very often the victims are under tremendous pressure, both internal and external, not to disclose the abuse or to take any action to put an end to it and so it continues until the abuser chooses to desist.

PAEDOPHILIA AND EPHEBOPHILIA

Some make a distinction between sexual abuse of children who are prepubescent and those who are pubescent or post pubescent. The former is known as paedophilia (literally, 'love of children' and the latter ephebophilia (love of adolescents). These are psychiatric terms meaning sexual interest in children of varying ages. According to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* the “focus of Paedophilia involves sexual activity with a prepubescent child (generally age 13 years or younger)”.¹⁰ To be diagnosed as a paedophile, an individual must be 16 years or older and there must be an age difference of 5 years between him and his victims. Individuals with this disorder have an attraction to children of a particular age range.

Some individuals with paedophilia “may limit their activity to undressing the child and looking, exposing themselves, masturbating in the presence of the child, gently touching and fondling the child.”

⁷Ibid., 47.

⁸Gil E. *Outgrowing the pain: A book for and about adults abused as children* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1988), 17.

⁹ Virani P. *Bitter Chocolate: Child sexual abuse in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2000), 6.

¹⁰American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders*, 4th edition (Washington: Author, 1994), 227.

Others may engage in oral-genital contact and vaginal or anal penetration and use of varying degrees of force in doing so¹¹.

The same document specifies 3 criteria that must be met in order to be diagnosed as a paedophilia. First, the adult must experience, “over a period of at least six months, recurrent, intense sexually arousing fantasies, sexual urges, or behaviour involving sexual activity with a prepubescent child or children.” Second, the fantasies and sexual urges, or behaviour cause the individual clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of function.” Third, the individual must be at least 16 years old and “at least 5 years older than the child or children.”¹²

Many paedophiles are personally immature. These have not developed normal inter-personal skills and have poor self-esteem. They are drawn to children because they feel more in control of the situation. Some of them are psychologically arrested and share childish interests. They are more comfortable relating to children than other adults. Many of them also have a history of being sexually abused as children¹³.

The individuals with paedophilia are classified into two classes. One class labelled as the exclusive Type is sexually attracted only to children. The other, Nonexclusive Type is sometimes attracted to adults as well. They are also classified as: a) personally immature, b) regressed, or c) aggressive. The most common is the personally immature paedophile. Such persons have never succeeded in developing mature and healthy levels of interpersonal skills and feel attracted to children mostly because the control they feel in relating to young children. These begin by befriending the child with “stories, games and disarming relationship,” - a kind of “drawn-out courtship.” The regressed paedophile has developed a strong and

confident heterosexuality, but at some point during adulthood “begins to develop a sense of sexual inadequacy, has problems in dealing with everyday stresses, and often becomes alcoholic.” The least common version is the aggressive paedophile. These often have a history of antisocial behaviour and also strong hostility toward woman. These are likely to assault their victims often inflicting severe physical pain and harm.¹⁴ Currently, both paedophilia and ephebophilia are considered grave moral failings and legal offences. Paedophilia is also a sexual psychiatric disorder, but not ephebophilia.¹⁵

EFFECTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE

Sexual abuse experienced in childhood leaves almost irreparable psychological scars which affect adult behaviour. As a Catholic priest who is involved in counselling, I have observed the following effects among adults who are survivors of child sexual abuse.

Relational Problems

Sexually abused children find adult relationships very difficult and sometimes extremely painful. These can be manifested in the following tendencies: isolation, moodiness, frequent infatuation, rigid and controlled behaviour and to be easily hurt. Relational problems may be the offshoot of severe negative feelings towards oneself. Sexual abuse makes victims feel, “I am bad” and this feeling is reinforced over the years. Perfectionism, compulsive achievement, serious ascetical practices, attention to excessive cleanliness and order can all be unsuccessful means adopted by the survivor to restore lost self-image. Women abused as children by men tend to have difficulty in forming heterosexual relationships. Their anxiety is that men

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, 528.

¹³ W. H. Masters, V. E. Johnson and R. C. Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 5th edition (Delhi: Pearson Education, 1995), 458.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 459.

¹⁵ L. Sperry, “A primer on sex and sexuality”, *Human Development*, 24 (4), 2003, 35. Cases of sexual exploitation of children and adolescents in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda have appeared in several studies (e.g. Andersson et al., 2012;

International Labour Organisation [ILO] and International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour [IPEC], 2001; Kisanga et al., 2013; Lalor, 2004; McCleary-Sills et al., 2013; McCranna et al., 2006; Silberschmidt and Rasch, 2001; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 1999[UNICEF], 2003. Research has shown that approximately one out of three females and one out of five males have been victims of child sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2003)

will misuse them.¹⁶ Men who are abused as children by women likewise have difficulty in relating with women in a healthy manner.

Physical Problems

One of the common physical symptoms observed in victims of abuse is sleep disorder. The abused goes under severe stress which deprives them of sleep. A possible reason for sleep disorder could be that sexual abuse had taken place while the survivors were asleep. Other symptoms are headache, backache, chest ache, digestive problems, abdominal pains, muscle ache, dizziness. Disorders such as frigidity or sexual addictions can become part of a sexually abused person's life. In adults, addiction to alcohol can be a problem. It is developed as an attempt to numb the memories and the pain of abuse.

Emotional Problems

Handling emotions presents a major problem to an adult who was sexually abused as a child. Often the survivor is not aware of the deep emotional disturbance that is a consequence of the abuse. Some find it extremely hard to handle this disturbance and tend to hurt themselves physically. Inflicting physical pain on themselves through self-mutilations such as cutting, burning, tattooing is a way of numbing the emotional pain.

Anger is the most difficult feeling for them to handle. Anger, hatred, revengeful feelings play a major role in determining their response towards the various experiences of life. Often, as a survival tool, anger is suppressed or expressed indirectly.

Feelings of shame and guilt also have a major role in deciding the type of behaviour one would adopt after the experience of abuse. The shame associated with the abuse prevents the survivor from disclosing it. Fear is another common emotion that disturbs or blocks the process of their growth and development. One fear that is experienced strongly and often is of authority figures. Since they have been mistreated in the past by someone in power, they fear that everyone in power will take advantage of them.

Social Problems

The social symptoms of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, according to Rossetti may range from extreme withdrawal and isolation to rebelliousness against society. A person's tendency to get sexually involved with his/her companions can be the result of the experience of being abused in childhood.

Spiritual Problems

The experience of feeling abandoned by God while going through abuse makes prayer difficult, and often a mechanical ritual. "Where was God when I was being abused" is a question that many a survivor asks in pain and anger. Capacity to trust God or even see God as benevolent is undermined. There can also be a feeling of impending punishment by God. It is possible that neurotic guilt, with its source in the abuse and accumulated over the years, constantly troubles the adult with the nagging awareness of a self-unworthy of being loved by God. Victims often develop pseudo-spirituality unaware of the lack of depth and integrity in their personal prayer life. Some indicators of possible abuse could be: inability to concentrate during prayer, persistent sleepiness during prayer, lack of growth in spiritual life in spite of sincere efforts, inability to experience the love of God, and the tendency to spiritualize ordinary experiences.

Other Problems

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse seem to suffer from amnesia-memory loss which makes them forget easily and fail to concentrate. Intellectual work becomes a challenge for such people. There is a likelihood of these adults with a wounded sexuality getting sexually interested in children and turning out to be predators on innocent children. They tend to live through an inner conflict of wanting to respond to sexual desires and at the same time being very afraid to act on them or talk about them. Sexual pleasure experienced at the time of abuse is later sought either vicariously through consumption of pornography or through

¹⁶R. R. DeBlassie and D. Meier, "Sexual abuse of children", *Human Development*, 9(3), 1988, 37.

masturbation. As adults these survivors tend to become possessive in their relationships. Sexual boundaries become difficult as they tend to see people in terms of “body parts.”

CAUSES LEADING TO SEXUAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

From my observations, readings and sharing I identify the following causes as leading to sexual abuse and harassment in East Africa. Obviously, these are not an exhaustive presentation of the causes of sexual abuse but are only a few indicators.

Discrimination as a Form of Workplace Control

Sexual harassment of women can occur largely because women occupy inferior job positions and job roles; at the same time, sexual harassment works to keep women in such positions. If sex discrimination forces women into lower paying jobs, sexual harassment helps keep them there. Women who try to break into traditionally all-male work, such as construction jobs, medicine or investment banking, often suffer even more intense harassment clearly aimed at forcing them to leave.

Moral Decay

Immoral acts are increasing at a disturbing rate in East Africa. The courts are flooded with cases of rape, incest, indecent assault and unnatural offences. Already child abuse has been acknowledged as one of the biggest challenges to lawmakers, judicial officers and social workers. Sexual harassment and sexual abuse have become very common even in the institutions of higher education. The perpetrators (Lecturers, Professors etc.), though well-educated intellectually and professionally, feel nothing about it. On the other hand, some of the female students find security in sex bribes for the successful completion of their studies. Also, indecent or attractive clothing worn by young girls could be one of the factors that fuels the problem of harassment and abuse.

¹⁷ Poverty is frequently cited as the primary motive for involvement in prostitution by young women. Mdungu and Mhagama (2000, p. 5) report that some girls are encouraged into prostitution by their parents: “It was ... revealed that some parents indirectly tell their children to engage in commercial sex by telling them to go and ‘look around’ and when a child

Lack of Proper Reporting Systems

Sexual harassment and abuse in institutions of education on female students in the East Africa are high because the institutions do not have proper reporting systems and the victims are scared to do so. If there are proper reporting channels for students at the universities to report cases of sexual assaults, then most people will be afraid to commit this offence and students would not be afraid of coming out to report. This is a problem all over the world but the cases are minimal in some countries.

Myths and Beliefs Associated with Sexual Abuse (Especially of Children and Women)

Perpetrators abuse children due to various reasons like cruelty, beliefs about becoming rich, developing their businesses and getting healed from diseases. Some abnormal beliefs exist in the Society, e.g., one having sex with old females may lead to one becoming rich and prosperous; getting sexual organs of the females would promise the same, thus some find no problem in killing and extracting sexual organs of the females such as breasts and the vagina.

Poverty and Household Sleeping Patterns

Poverty is another major cause of sexual harassment and sexual abuse in East Africa. Living in extended families in most of the places, there is lack of adequate sleeping space within the households. The sleeping of adults and children in the same room is cited as a risk factor that could drive adults into sexually exploiting children. Even when household members have a bigger house, they rent most of the rooms to tenants for income generation. This causes children to share rooms with adults, get exposed to sexual acts, hence the risk of child sexual abuse.¹⁷

Breakdown of Marriages, Separation of Parents and Lack of Parental Guidance

The findings reveal that parental monitoring and guidance in East Africa are in the decline and this

brings in money, no questions are asked.” In the area of school education, the introduction of “user fees” has been associated with impoverished girl children providing “sexual favors to secure money for fees” (NGO Forum, 2000, p. 9).

provides chances for abuses to increase steadily.¹⁸ In case of children, when the family disintegrates, they remain victims and easily can end up in the hands of perpetrators.

THE PROCESS OF HEALING AND RECOVERY FROM SEXUAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT

The healing process from sexual harassment and abuse does not come easily. Adults working to undo the havoc caused by sexual wounds need adequate time to heal. They need to refrain from setting up a time frame to fix the devastating damage or rushing the healing process. According to Engel the following factors influence the process of healing: The severity and duration of abuse, the amount of time spent on the recovery process, the openness and frankness with which the survivor approaches the process and the amount of support received from the helper and the ambient.¹⁹ The following are some of the processes and steps involved; which the victim may have to go through with the help of the experts:

Step 1: Healing after sexual abuse

- *Breaking the Silence:* The most painful part of the process of healing is breaking the silence around the secret kept for so long. "An essential part of healing from child sexual abuse is telling the truth about your life. The sexual molestation of children, and the shame that results, thrive in an atmosphere of silence. Breaking that silence is a powerful healing "tool". But when one stays silent, he/she impedes help and reinforce victimhood. The process of breaking silence: remembering the past, writing one's sexual

story, telling the story and understanding that the abuse was not their fault.

- *Reach out to someone you trust:* It is common to think that silence erases the abuse, but being in denial does not heal someone. Therefore, hiding only adds to feelings of shame. Talking about it to a confidant, sets one free. However, it is important to be selective about whom to tell, especially for the first time. The best confidant should be someone supportive, empathetic, and calm.
- *Challenge your sense of helplessness and isolation:* Trauma leaves one feeling powerless and vulnerable. It is important to remind oneself of his/her strengths and coping skills in tough times. One of the best ways to reclaim this sense of power is by helping others. One should involve in voluntary activities, reach out to a friend in need, or donate to a charity. Support groups for other sexual abuse survivors can help one to feel less isolated and alone. They also provide invaluable information on how to cope with symptoms and work towards recovery.
- *Assign responsibility where it belongs – the abuser/harasser:* Even if one is aware that they were not responsible for the abuse, he/she may still struggle with feelings of guilt and shame. Admitting the truth of what happened, will be easier to fully accept that one is not responsible thus there is nothing to be ashamed of. It is important to keep in mind that the following factors tend to resurface when one feels guilty or ashamed.
- *He/she did not stop the assault from happening:* After the fact, it is easy to second guess what one did or did not do. But when in the midst of an

¹⁸ Government policy on the perceived increase in the sexual exploitation of children in Tanzania identifies the break down in the traditional communal childcare system as important. In the past, it is suggested that all adults were entitled to discipline all children of the village and to advise parents on their child rearing efforts. Many Tanzanians today report reluctance, relative to their parents' generation, in engaging in such supervisory behavior of other people's children. The Government Child Development Policy notes: "...parents and guardians have been left to promote the moral development of their children on their own, mainly because of the breakdown of the system of communal responsibility for child care. As a

result, there is no common direction but rather each parent or guardian brings up children in the ways he sees fit... Because of the decline in morality and neglect of our traditions and customs, there has been a large increase in cases of rape and defilement of children in our society" (Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, 1996, p. 31).

¹⁹ Beverly Engel, "Healing the Shame of Childhood Abuse through Self-Compassion" <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-compassion-chronicles/201501/healing-the-shame-childhood-abuse-through-self-compassion>. Assessed on 12/01/2020.

assault, the brain and body are in shock, one cannot think clearly. Many people say they feel “frozen.” There is no need to judge oneself for this a natural reaction to trauma. If one could have stopped the assault, she/he would have.

- *You trusted someone you “shouldn’t” have:* One of the most difficult things to deal with following an assault by an acquaintance or relative because it is violation of trust. It is natural to start questioning or wondering if she/he missed warning signs. In this case, it is the attacker to blame and should be the one to feel guilty and ashamed.
- *One was drunk or dressed in a certain way:* There is a tendency feel guilty of being drunk or dressed seductively but it is important to remember that regardless of the circumstances, the only one who is responsible for the assault is the perpetrator.

Step 2: Prepare for flashbacks and upsetting memories

The experts should remember that, when one goes through something stressful, the body temporarily goes into “fight-or-flight” mode. When the threat has passed, the body calms down. But traumatic experiences such as rape can cause the nervous systems to become stuck in a state of high alert thus the victim is hypersensitive to the smallest of stimuli. This is the case for many rape survivors. Flashbacks, nightmares, and intrusive memories are extremely common, especially in the first few months following the assault. For those who go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, they can last much longer. Hence the victim is to be helped to prevent the stress of flashbacks and upsetting memories through:

- *Trying to anticipate and prepare for triggers:* Common triggers include anniversary dates; people or places associated with the assault; and certain sights, sounds, or smells. One is aware of what triggers may cause an upsetting reaction, he/she will be in a better position to understand what is happening and take steps to calm down.
- *Paying attention to one’s body danger signals:* The body and emotions give clues when one is starting to feel stressed and unsafe. These clues

include feeling tense, holding one’s breath, racing thoughts, shortness of breath, hot flashes, dizziness, and nausea.

- *Taking immediate steps to self-soothe:* When one notices any of the above symptoms, it is important to quickly act to calm down before they spiral out of control. One of the quickest and most effective ways to calm anxiety and panic is to slow down one’s breathing.

It is not always possible to prevent flashbacks. But in case they arise and one feels losing touch with the present and feeling like the assault is happening all over again, there are things to do. Some tips to deal with flashbacks are:

- Accepting and reassuring one that this is a flashback, not reality. The traumatic event is over and you survived. Here is a simple script that can help: “I am feeling (panicked, frightened, overwhelmed, etc.) because I am remembering (traumatic event), but as I look around, I can see that [traumatic event] isn’t happening right now and I am not actually in danger.”
- Ground yourself in the present: Grounding techniques help one to direct attention away from the flashback to the present environment. Some examples include tapping or touching one’s arms or describing the actual environment and what one sees when looking around (for example, name the place where you are, the current date, and three things seen when one looks around).

Step 3: Reconnecting to One’s Body and Feelings

To recover after abuse, one needs to reconnect to one’s body and feelings. It is frightening to get back in touch with your body and feelings following a sexual trauma. In many ways, rape makes one’s body the enemy, something that has been violated and contaminated—something you may hate or want to ignore. It is also scary to face the intense feelings associated with the assault. But while the process of reconnecting may feel threatening, it is not actually dangerous. Feelings, while powerful, are not a reality, they are not capable of hurting or driving someone insane. The true danger to one’s

physical and mental health comes from avoiding them. Once reconnected to the body and feelings, one feels more safe, confident, and powerful. The following are some of the techniques that can help one to reconnect with one's body and the way one feels:

- *Rhythmic movement:* Rhythm can be very healing. It helps us relax and regain a sense of control over our bodies. Anything that combines rhythm and movement will work: dancing, drumming, and marching. It is good to also incorporate it into your walking or running routine by concentrating on the back-and-forth movements of your arms and legs.
- *Mindfulness meditation:* It can be practiced anywhere, even while walking or eating. Simply focus on what you are feeling in the present movement—including any bodily sensations and emotions. The goal is to observe without judgment.
- *Massage:* After any abuse e.g., rape, one may feel uncomfortable with human touch. But touching and being touched is an important way we give and receive affection and comfort. It enables one to reopen to human contact through massage therapy.

Step 4: Stay Connected and Nurture Oneself

Healing from sexual abuse or trauma is a gradual, ongoing process. It does not happen overnight, nor do the memories of the trauma ever disappear completely. There are things one can do to cope with residual symptoms and reduce one's anxiety and fear. Following are some of the helpful activities:

- *Stay connected to family and friends:* It is normal to feel isolated and disconnected from others following a sexual abuse. One may be tempted to withdraw from social activities and the loved ones. But it is important to stay connected to life and supportive people. Support from other people is vital for recovery. However, support does not mean one should dwell on what happened. Having fun and laughing with people can be equally healing.

- *Participate in social activities:* One should be in solidarity with others even if he/she does not feel like it. Do "normal" things with other people, things that have nothing to do with the sexual trauma.
- *Reconnect with old and new friends:* If one lives alone or far from family and friends, he/she should try to reach out and make new friends. Take a class or join a club to meet people with similar interests or reach out to neighbours or work colleagues.
- *Support healing by nurturing yourself:* It is important to nurture oneself in all ways and means possible. One should accept, love, appreciate oneself and this will in turn accelerate the entire process of bringing wholeness once again.
- *Take time to rest and restore your body's balance:* That means taking a break when tired and avoiding the temptation to burnout by throwing oneself into activities. Avoid doing anything compulsively, including work. It is always important to eat right, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep—doubly so when one is healing from trauma. Exercise in particular can soothe the traumatized nervous system, relieve stress, and help one feel stronger and in control of the body
- *Be smart about media consumption:* One should avoid watching anything that could trigger bad memories or flashbacks. This includes news reports about sexual violence and sexually explicit TV shows and movies. It is also advisable to temporarily avoid anything that is overly stimulating, including social media.
- *Avoid alcohol and drugs:* Avoid the temptation to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. Substance use worsens many symptoms of trauma, including emotional numbing, social isolation, anger, and depression. It also interferes with treatment and can add to problems at home and in relationships.

The Use of Spirituality and Scripture in the Process of Healing and Recovery from Sexual Abuse and Harassment

- *Trust in the providential plan of God:* Deep faith in God and his plan can be a great healing remedy. For example, Christians can take recourse to the faith in the assurance of God by reading and recalling his word from the Bible: “*When you call I will answer*” (Jeremiah 33:3). “*I am with you always*” (Matthew 28:20) “*I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plan for your welfare, not woes! Plans to give you future full of hope*” (Jeremiah 29:11). He is a God who walks with you, and is always present to you. A deepened faith in the assurance of God leads to the experience of his constant presence.
- *Surrendering the sexual wound to divine healing:* A survivor of sexual abuse once shared her process of healing and recovery in the following words: “... I felt that God healed part by part whatever needed healing and restoration as I shared my story with my counsellor and spiritual guide.” Another survivor said, “If a human being can be non-judgmental and always present to me without ever blaming me and even when I deserved to be blamed, how much more would God be non-judgmental and compassionate to me.” Counsellors or persons assisting the client can become the facilitators and carriers of divine healing when they attend to the wounded client without making them feel blamed for their pain. In the process of helping the client if we come to that moment where the “Divine Knitter can re-fashion the broken part of their lives, if the client feels ready to re-enter the wounding experience, the facilitator can gently lead there in the company of Jesus using an imaginary exercise. The client is helped to listen to Jesus and take hold of the “word” He has for the client. The words of Jesus become the life-giving source for the client. Leading the client to Biblical scenes can also serve as a way of rebuilding their wounded lives. The scene of the potter and clay from Jeremiah (18:1-4) has helped many wounded persons to find healing.

CONCLUSION

We are all fragile human beings; while still in the womb, as new-borns, and as children we are dependent and vulnerable individuals who must rely on others for physical, emotional development and well-being. We are placed into the hands of caregivers, be they parents, guardians or other authority figures, to be moulded and started on the path to maturity. These caregivers become objects of trust and security for children in their very early years of development. Unfortunately, at times this trust is violated in ways that cause physical and emotional harm that can last a lifetime. This paper addresses one of the most pernicious violations of that trust. Not only in East Africa, but globally, children are traumatized by sexual abuse, harassment, and discriminatory behaviour at the hands of those on whom they rely for their well-being. These abuses take on many forms: physical, emotional, and psychological. It can be verbal and non-verbal. As a result, the ability of the victims to grow in healthy relationships is stunted and their maturation process is stagnated.

The healing process can be long and arduous. Victims must be surrounded by caring and trustworthy people to restore their self-confidence. They must be allowed to proceed at their own pace by understanding people who can assure the victims that none of what has happened to them is their fault. When certain events remind the victims of their trauma, there are ways suggested in this paper to overcome the feelings of abuse recurrence. But of equal importance is positive motivation to move forward with their lives with a new perspective and in a way that is self-empowering and promotes self-worth. While not easy, individuals can turn their lives around by concentrating on those persons and things that make them feel good about themselves. Developing healthy relationships to counter their hurtful experiences and convincing them that there is always hope can be major steps forward in their healing process. An effective source of hope can be found in the providential plan of God, knowing that He has a plan for us, and that plan is rooted in an unfailing love. Victims of abuse can be comforted by the knowledge that God is closest to them when they are hurting, being assured that they are never alone.