

Breaking the silence

By: Anonymous - Africa

"I was living a difficult marriage where psychological violence was prevalent. I became in turn aggressive and the violence escalated. My marriage ended badly and I, like many other women in African countries, took the blame and thought that I should have been more obedient, more passive, more loving."

So I packed all those feelings inside and went on to reorganize my life and those of my children as best as I could, but still I always kept feeling a failure.

In 2002, more than 20 years later, I joined an association involved in non-violence. I was intrigued but did not know what I could contribute. Then, a United Nations (UN) agency needed to make a report on the status of violence against women in my country. They contracted my association to do the research.

I talked with women from all walks of life: rich, poor, peasants and professionals and found out that my case was not unique. I was not alone in being miserable in an unhealthy relationship. In fact it was an international issue and women all over the world were speaking out.

This report helped give a voice to nameless women. Women who suffered in silence, who were afraid of being branded as troublemakers and thrown out of their families. These fears did not become reality.

People, men and women, community leaders, the media, all sensed that this was the time to "break the silence" and examine the increasing violence in homes. So the number of talk show radio programs, consultations between women and church leaders increased, even the national television became loud and eager to bring the topic out in the open. We all knew somebody who was in the same situation but did not know what to do in order to change.

Now there are two centres opened for women who seek legal advice or just need somebody to listen, who can understand, and who can help them.

Yes, I feel that I contributed a little to bring awareness to people and start the long process of questioning before offering solutions. At the same time, my confidence grew and I became able to relate to women victims of domestic violence without feeling guilt. To have become aware of nonviolence allowed me also to tell my pain and confusion without looking only for someone to blame.

The clear analysis of the cycle of violence, especially about its silence, allowed me to find specific ways to remove its supporting pillars and bring domestic peace."