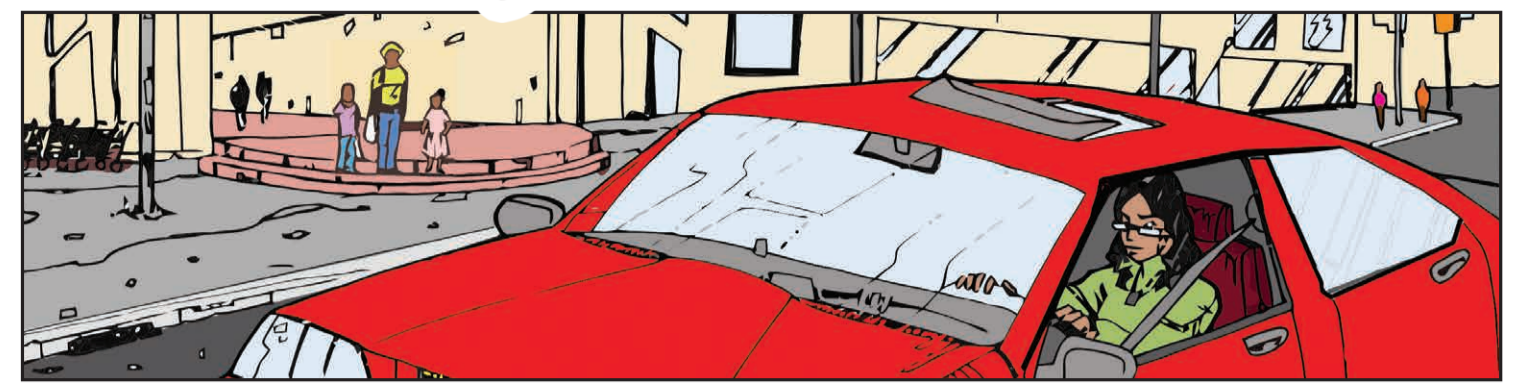


Domestic violence, HIV and the cycle of violence



Mummy, look there is Daddy's car.

It can't be Daddy, he is at work.

You are right. It is not Daddy but it is our car. His friend is driving it. She is very pretty. Daddy likes her a lot. I saw him hugging her on the weekend when you were visiting Tannie Elizabeth.

Daddy and I need to talk.

Are you cheating on me? I saw the signs but I didn't want to believe it. Today I saw that woman from the shebeen driving your car. Why was she driving your car? You never let me drive it!

I would never cheat on you my love. You must have been mistaken. We are not the only people who own a Toyota Corolla.

I am not stupid. It was our car. Joseph told me that he saw you hugging her on the weekend. What else have you been doing with her?

So you believe our son over me? I am hurt. I thought you loved me as much as I love you.

I don't want you having relationships with other women.

I can do what I want.

I can do what I want.

Why did you tell your Mother about Queenie? I told you to keep quiet.

Stop crying. Keep quiet.

Why did you take my ball?

Stop crying. Keep quiet.

There are clear links between domestic violence and the way that our children behave with their friends and in their relationships later in life.

- Domestic violence usually becomes worse over time, putting children at risk of serious injury.
- Domestic violence teaches children that violence is an acceptable way of dealing with issues.
- Domestic violence teaches children that it is okay to use violence against someone you love.
- Domestic violence teaches children to be aggressive towards other children.
- Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to be violent as adults.
- Domestic violence can affect self-esteem by making the victim feel scared, sad, ashamed or worthless.
- Domestic violence can destroy the relationship between a parent and a child.

Johannes is beating me. He even beat Joseph. Joseph is starting to copy Johannes's behaviour too. Joseph used to play so nicely with Isabella but yesterday I saw him hit her.

You do not have to accept the violence.

It is my fault, I make him angry. I must accept it - what else can I do?

No you do not have to accept it. When my husband and I have an argument he doesn't hit me or the children. Would you and the children like to stay with us for a while? You can decide what to do about your future without having to worry when the next beating will come.

Baby I love you! Please don't leave! I will never hurt you or the children again.

I love you too. I won't leave. The children are asleep. We can go inside and talk.

Don't ever leave me again!!! I am your husband. You do what I say. Don't talk to your friends about this or anything else.

Now show me how much you love me.

No Johannes, not like this.

Johannes and I had sex. I didn't want to but he insisted. He didn't use a condom and I know he is having a relationship with another woman. What if he is HIV positive and has infected me too?

We need to get you to a doctor. Would you also like to speak to a social worker? She can help you decide what to do next. You can lay a charge of rape with the police if you want.

I am going to do an examination to collect evidence from your body. You say that your husband did not use a condom and that he is in a relationship with another woman so I will give you medication to prevent HIV infection. Would you also like me to give you medication to prevent pregnancy?

There is medicine that can reduce your chances of becoming infected with HIV. It is called post-exposure-prophylaxis (PEP) medication. It will work only if you start taking it very soon after the rape. It is best to start taking PEP within 72 hours if there is a risk that the rape has exposed you to HIV. It works best if you start it even sooner.

You must take PEP for 28 days. If you stop taking it too soon, it will not work. Government will provide PEP for free if you cannot pay. If the hospital or clinic where you are treated does not have a full course of PEP on hand, they should have a starter pack with enough pills for 3-7 days. Ask for this starter pack as a temporary measure until you can get the full 28-day supply.

There are also medicines that can reduce your chances of becoming infected with other sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis or hepatitis. It is best to start taking these medications as soon as possible if there is a risk that you have been exposed to sexually transmitted infections.

There is medicine that can prevent pregnancy if it is taken right away. This medicine is sometimes called the 'morning-after pill'. You will probably have to take pills straight away and then again 12 hours later.

If medication is not taken correctly, it will not work. Be sure that you ask the doctor how to take the pills.

I am a social worker. I understand that talking about what happened to you is very difficult. I am going to try to help you deal with what happened so that you can feel stronger. I will give you information about how to lay a charge of rape, how to get a protection order to protect yourself and your children against future violence, how to apply for maintenance for your children and how to get a divorce. You do not have to take all of these steps, but it is good to know what your options are.

SIX MONTHS LATER ...

What is Johannes doing now?

He moved in with that girl from the shebeen. He phoned me last week to tell me that he is HIV positive. I am so glad you encouraged me to see a doctor after we had unprotected sex. I took the medication to prevent HIV and went for a test three months later. I am not HIV positive. But I am lucky - I could easily have been infected!

How are you coping?

Life is great! I got a job as a cashier at the bank. I went to the maintenance court too. It took a while to do all of the paperwork but the court made a maintenance order. It orders Johannes to pay N\$400 into my bank account every month. Together with my income, this gives us enough money to get by. I am finally in control of my life. I don't have to be afraid anymore, and now my children are safe. I am so happy!

Domestic Violence and HIV

Risks for women

Domestic violence has many negative emotional and physical consequences, including an increased risk of HIV infection.

The risk can be direct, through forced sex or refusal to use a condom during sex.

The risk can be indirect, such as where violence or threats of violence make women and girls afraid to seek counselling, testing or medical help.

Also, women who are victims of domestic violence often have a reduced sense of self-worth which can cause them to accept risky sexual practices.

Risks for children

A child who has been abused or exposed to domestic violence may have behaviour problems later in life - such as drug abuse, having multiple sexual partners, or trading sex for money, drugs or shelter. These are all risk factors for HIV infection.

Research also shows that victims of violence may become abusers themselves in later life, which keeps this dangerous cycle going.

More comics and other publications concerning violence can be found at www.lac.org.na.

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