RAISE YOUR VOICE
EMPOWERED. ACTIVATED. ENGAGED

WHISPERS IN THE SILENCE

STORIES OF SURVIVAL, CHOICE, AND NAVIGATING THE LOOPHOLES IN KENYA'S ABORTION LAWS

AN ANTHOLOGY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEATURE STORY
When Childhood Ends Too Soon

STORY 1
Fighting for Control of Her Body

STORY 2
Freedom with a Price: My Campus Secret

STORY 3
Behind Every Choice, There's a Story You Haven't Heard

STORY 4
Three Times Lucky, Many Never Make It

STORY 5
Desperation in a Bottle

STORY 6
What I Feared Became My Turning Point

STORY 7
From Innocence to Insanity

STORY 8
I wanted to do it right

STORY 9
Living in Fear of My Own Body

STORY 10
Growing Up Fast in My Father's Shadow

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STORY 11
The Ghosts of My Choices Still Visit Me

STORY 12
The Silent Pain No One Talks About

STORY 13
When Faith and Fear Collide

STORY 14
I Chose Life Over Societal Approval

STORY 15
After the Violation Came the Silence

STORY 16
Whispers from the womb

STORY 17
My Heart Was Full, My Hands Were Tired

STORY 18
I Survived the Procedure, Not the Pain

STORY 19
My abortion story turned me to a SRHR advocate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Whispers in the Silence: Stories of Survival, Choice, and Navigating the Loopholes in Kenya's Abortion Laws is a bold and humanizing collection of lived realities, stories that strip away statistics to reveal the heartbeat of Kenya's reproductive justice struggle. Through nineteen deeply personal narratives, the anthology amplifies the voices of girls and women who have faced impossible choices in the face of stigma, unsafe systems, and laws that criminalize rather than protect.
From Anyango's haunting experience in When Childhood Ends Too Soon, we see how poverty, parental neglect, and lack of information push girls as young as fourteen into situations no child should face. Her story sets the tone for the anthology, where survival is both a victory and a wound.

From the slums of Kibra to university hostels and rural villages, the stories trace a shared thread: a system that silences girls instead of safeguarding them. For instance, Anne's chilling confession in *Desperation in a Bottle* and Debra's first year at university were supposed to be liberation. Instead, it became a lesson in vulnerability. Her reflection captures the double-edged sword of campus freedom: "In university, you notice everyone seems to have a boyfriend except you… and that's when you might find yourself in a hole that brings your life to a standstill." Her story exposes the silent suffering of young women who, trapped by stigma and fear, turn to unsafe abortions while battling shame, secrecy, and loneliness.

Each story in this anthology widens the lens. Hellen's fight for control of her body in Story 1 mirrors the desperation of countless women forced into dangerous paths by unaffordable and restrictive healthcare. Karen's ordeal in "*Behind Every Choice, There's a Story You Haven't Heard*", confronts the illusion of choice when fear, abandonment, and ignorance collide.

As the anthology unfolds, the tone shifts from grief to awakening. Stories like What I Feared Became My Turning Point, The Ghosts of My Choices Still Visit Me, and The Silent Pain No One Talks About remind readers that behind every statistic lies a woman whose body carries both memory and meaning. The final stories, such as I Survived the Procedure, Not the Pain and My Abortion Story Turned Me into a SRHR Advocate, illustrate how pain transforms into purpose, how silence gives way to voice.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Each of these raw narratives offers a collective testimony of courage and survival. They challenge policymakers, faith leaders, and communities to listen, not to judge. They reveal that Kenya's restrictive abortion environment is not just a legal issue, but a human one costing lives, futures, and dignity.

In Whispers in the Silence, every voice matters. Each story is both a wound and a weapon, a call to reimagine a Kenya where girls and women can make choices about their bodies safely, freely, and without fear.

Raise Your Voice CBO

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This anthology would not have been possible without the immense courage, honesty, and resilience of the young people who opened their hearts and shared their stories with us. To the adolescent girls and young women who trusted us with their lived experiences, your voices are the heartbeat of this collection. You turned pain into power and silence into speech. Your stories remind us that advocacy begins with truth, and change begins when someone dares to speak.

Telling abortion stories is never simple. It often means revisiting moments of fear, stigma, or loss, while also honoring the choices made in the face of strength or necessity. To those who trusted us with such truths, thank you.

We also thank the advocates and communities who defend the right to choice and bodily autonomy, journalists, editors, and reviewers who shaped this project with care. Your insight ensured these narratives were treated with dignity. To the artists and designers who gave the anthology its form, thank you for creating a safe space for these voices.

We extend profound gratitude to the Global Fund for Women for their unwavering support and partnership in amplifying community voices and advancing Reproductive justice.

And to you, the reader: thank you for engaging with this collection. May these stories challenge, comfort, and remind you that behind every choice is a human life, a voice, a story.

In solidarity,

Raise Your Voice Team

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When we listen closely, the statistics begin to speak. They speak in the trembling voice of a 14-year-old girl asking for help in a system that has already failed her. They speak in the silence of girls forced to grow up too fast, navigating poverty, violence, and stigma with nothing but resilience and hope.

These stories are not just narratives. They are mirror reflections of policy gaps, moral judgment, and collective neglect. They remind us that behind every headline on "teen pregnancies" or "unsafe abortions" is a human being and especially a young girl who has been denied choices, dignity, and safety.

Over the years, Raise Your Voice, believe storytelling is a form of resistance. Every lived experience shared in this anthology is a demand for policies that prioritize reproductive justice over punishment and criminalization, and science and evidence over ideology.

This anthology, Whispers from the Silence: Stories of Survival, Choice, and Navigating the Loopholes in Kenya's Abortion Laws, is both a testimony and a protest. It challenges the hypocrisy of systems that police women's bodies while failing to protect them. It honors the girls who spoke their truths, sometimes at great personal cost.
We invite you to read these stories not as tales of shame, but as blueprints for change to ensure no girl has to risk her life to make a choice about her own body.
The time for silence is long gone, because these are not just their stories, they are ours.

Doris Kathia

EDITOR'S NOTE

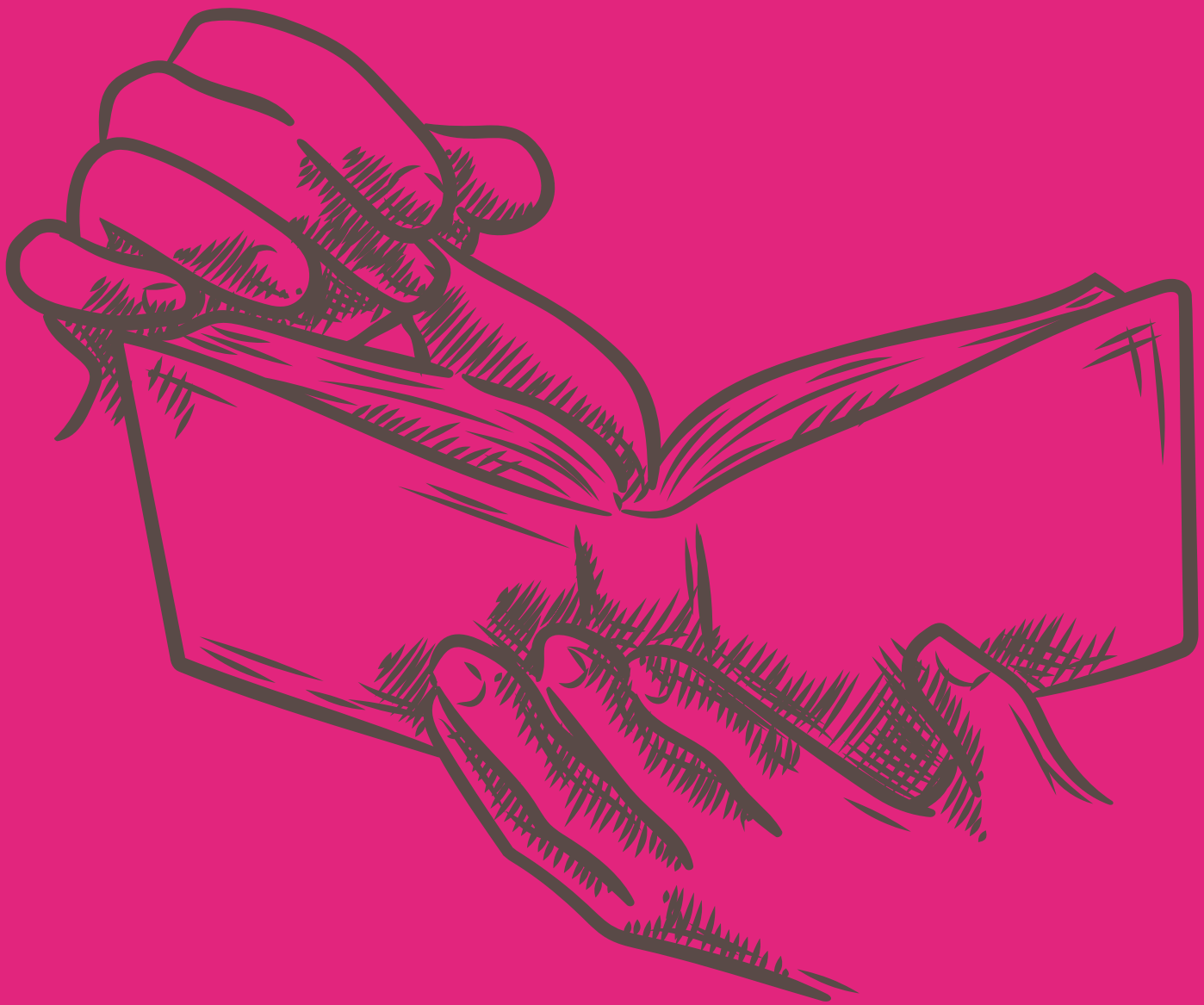
Abortion is an issue that stirs deep emotions - rightly so. But beyond the politics and debates are real people, real lives, and far too often, real loss. As journalists and editors, we do not have the luxury of distance. We listen. We bear witness. We carry the weight of stories told in hushed voices: Of girls who sought help and found harm, of families shattered by preventable deaths, of dreams silenced too soon.

Each interview is a quiet tragedy. And yet, with every story shared, we are reminded of a duty: To keep telling them.
To write about unsafe abortion is not merely to report; it is to remember. It is to etch into history the names and lives of those the world might otherwise forget. These stories are not just narratives :They are acts of resistance against erasure, acts of love for those who can no longer speak for themselves.

We share these voices to reflect the truth - as uncomfortable it may be, for those who believe unsafe abortion is a distant or minor concern. And in doing so, we hold on to the hope that through understanding, minds will change, and futures will be saved.
This anthology is for every girl whose story never made the headlines. May their memories be a call to conscience.

Mary Malemba

LET'S GET STARTED...



FEATURE STORY

WHEN CHILDHOOD ENDS TOO SOON

ANYANGO, 17

At the age of 17, Anyango has seen it all.
From having an alcoholic and irresponsible mother, to having a father who doesn't care about his child despite sleeping in the room. As a young girl, Anyango has been forced to grow and learn to behave and act like an adult.

At 14, while other girls were enjoying being teenagers, she, like thousands of girls living in the slum areas, was battling so many challenges; fighting to remain in school and perform well, providing for herself and being the only responsible person in her family. "I have grown up in a family where both the mother and father are alcoholics. They both knew nothing about providing for me as their child. For them, their responsibilities ended after putting a roof over my head."

"Even eating, I used to beg for food from our neighbours. Were it not for their generosity, I would have died of hunger," she says with tears rolling her cheeks.

But the generosity of the neighbours could not extend too much. It had limitations. There were things Anyango wished to have but the well-wishers couldn't give her.

“There are things you can’t ask for, such as menstruation pads, a bathing soap, body oil and even clothes; how can you even borrow a dress? These are private things and they should remain private. But I needed them and there was no way I could get them from my parents.”

Anyango then resorted to asking her friends how they managed to have all these things without the help of their parents. The friends were willing to show her their ways; sleeping with older men in exchange for money.

For many, such actions are out of question. But for many young girls who lack parental backing, “sex work” is their only way to surviving the rough tides of teenage hood in the slums.
“One day, one of the girls told me to dress up in my best dress as we were going out to a club where I would meet men who will provide for me. And true, getting at the club, men were gushing over me and one of them approached me and I said yes to him due to the promises he had given me,” she notes.

“But I didn’t realise the goodies had to come after exchange of sexual favours. The man told me he would only give me money when we have sex and since I really needed the money, I just obliged to his demands. However, the twist was, the man never wanted to use protection. He claimed that he was allergic to condoms.”

And just like many schoolgoing girls whose education system has failed to enlighten them with sexual and reproductive health education, Anyango confesses that she had no idea of any contraceptives alternatives that were available. And even if they were available, her underaged status would have probably locked her out from accessing the services.But what would you expect from a 14 year old?

Five months into the affair, Anyango found herself pregnant. The moment she informed the man, he took off and disappeared into thin air. She was left behind with the burden of knowing what to do with the pregnancy or with the baby that was growing inside her.

Anyango then resorted to informing her mother, who told her she had to terminate the pregnancy immediately.

“I was so scared of abortion because I had seen girls die from abortion. But my mother assured me that she had done it three times and she was still alive, and so I will survive.”
With surety, she agreed to go to the traditional doctor.
“My mother then took me to this dingy house, where, from the outside, it looked like an alcohol brewing den. When we got inside the house, an old woman whom I perceived to be a traditional doctor told me to lie down on a slice-sized mattress where she pressed my stomach and concluded that the pregnancy was around two months and I only needed a bitter herbal concoction to get rid of it,” she says.

Aunty Jane*, a hotline counselor, terms these “traditional doctors” as “nyamrerwa” who are always the people girls and women who can’t afford safe abortion go to.
“One, because they are easily accessible. Two, your privacy is guaranteed, and three, because these people are ready to help without asking many questions, unlike when they go to hospitals,” the counselor explains.

Upon partaking of the concoction, the woman ordered Anyango and her mother out of the house and asked them to wait at home for the procedure to end. “It’s like she thought I might die and she didn’t want me to die at her house.

“That’s typical of the ‘nyamreros’. They use herbs to terminate the pregnancy and they too don’t care about the aftermath. They don’t care if you survive or die. This then leaves girls and women in the hands of people who don’t really care about them. But they are the only options,” Anty Jane says.

The girl, her mother and the burden of secret walked home, amid pains and labour-like cramps.

And then, the bleeding started. First, a few drops, and then big chunks of it.

“I would sit on the bucket and blood would flow like water running on the tap.

This continued for around five days before the situation got worse. She was all alone. No one to help. Her mother had gone back to her drinking den.

“One night, I bled so much, to a point that I just collapsed when I tried to stand up and go ask for help. The falling down was so heavy that my neighbours heard and came to check, only to find me on the floor trying to fight for my life.”

“In that moment, my entire life flashed before me. I knew I was going to die. People were going to tag me “the girl who died after an abortion’.”

The neighbours then rushed Anyango to hospital, where the treatment, after learning the truth of what had happened, was nothing short of societal sneers and judgment.

> “WHENEVER I HAD PAIN AND I WOULD CALL FOR THEM, THEY WOULD COME SLOWLY AND ASK ‘DIDN’T YOU KNOW THE RESULTS OF ABORTING’ OR ‘WHO TOLD YOU TO HAVE SEX AT YOUR AGE”

The comments were so harsh and I sometimes regretted surviving and going to hospital.

But this is exactly what Ngara, the Lead Strategist at Raise Your Voice, an organization that seeks to sensitise girls from informal settlement about their reproductive health rights terms as systematic failures occasioned by vague policies and indecisiveness of the health systems.

Ngara says, on one hand, the government has continued to shut its eyes on the issue of young girls engaging on sex therefore fails to equip them with the right information about sexual and reproductive health, resulting in many teenage pregnancies.

“They deny these girls contraceptives and when they get pregnant, they tell them, ‘go deal with’. The government is sitting somewhere assuming these young people are not having sex, yet, a good percentage of them, as young as 10-years-old, are already sexually active, majority due to poverty,” he notes.

And on the other, due to lack of better options, the girls seek abortion services from unprofessional people, which then end up to death and for those who survive end up in hospitals seeking for post-abortion-care where the majority of the health workers are guided by their personal prejudice.

“In hospitals, survivors of unsafe abortion suffer stigma and rejection from health workers and it’s one of the reasons why majority of them prefer dying in their homes rather than going to hospital to seek for PAC,” he quips.
“But should we wait until the girl is dying for the health workers to help the girl. Why can’t we be clear on the laws and help the girl receive these services legally and not place them in harm's way.”
Aunty Jane says the majority of the girls call the center when they are in bad condition and want to seek advice on what to do.
“The only way to resolve this gap is by training the medical practitioners from not re-stigmatising these girls. They don’t even know what pushed these girls to get that abortion despite knowing it ain’t safe. Maybe they were raped, why should you stigmatise such an already traumatized girl,” she says.

But Ngara says the unsafe abortion is not only about the unprofessional conduct of health workers or “nyamreros’, but also the easily accessible rogue facility which are masked as “chemists”

Even though Anyango survived the ordeal, the question remains on how many teenage girls especially in the informal areas have found themselves seeking abortion services in unprofessional facilitators.
Ngara says the government and the Kenya Pharmacy and Poisons Board (PPB) have left such facilities unwatched, giving them liberty to conduct these illegal operations.

“Because of government’s restrictions, abortion services are expensive and very restricted, therefore pushing these girls and women to seek services from unprofessional doctors. PPB has also failed in keeping majority of chemists on check.

Every day, there are chemists popping up everywhere and they don’t follow up to ensure they abide by the law especially when it comes to providing professional advice regarding reproductive health. Yet, this is where the majority of the unsafe abortions are happening,” he says.

A Spotcheck on the majority of chemists in Kibra and Mukuru Kwa Njenga reveals that an “abortion pill” costs between Sh500 and Sh2,500.

For many of the girls and women in the slum areas, this is not affordable, but atleast they can raise this amount of money to acquire the drug.

For Ngara, the buck stops with the Pharmacy Board. “There is a need to have the board stamp its authority especially in the slum areas by reviewing all the chemists.”

Alternatively, Ngara says, chemists that are found to be operated by professionals, the government could use them as referral centers, where, once they receive a girl seeking abortion, they could refer them to the hospitals. “For this to work, the attitude of health workers needs to change.”

“Policy makers should also stop sitting on the fence about this conversation. It is time the law is interpreted well to avoid health workers who have personal prejudice interpret it according to their liking but for the masses,” says Ngara.

And while the relevant authorities continue to mark time on the abortion issue, millions of Kenyan girls will continue to suffer in the hands of “fake doctors” and also rogue health workers with unruly conducts in the hospitals.

For anyango, even though she survived the ordeal, her neighbours and a community of other unsafe abortion survivors keeps her glued and help her maintain her sanity.

> Meeting other survivors has continued to help me come to terms with what happened. I came to realise I’m not the only one who has gone through that journey. Having people sharing a common factor helps in easing the experience,

she says, smiling for the first time since sitting for the interview.

STORY 1

FIGHTING FOR CONTROL OF HER BODY

HELLEN, 24

In Kenya, thousands of women every year risk their lives through unsafe abortions. Restrictive laws, stigma, and lack of affordable services push many; especially those in informal settlements, into the hands of unqualified providers or dangerous methods. Hellen's story is one among many, but it shows in raw detail what these barriers mean for real women.

Hellen 's body had barely healed when her life took another sharp turn. Her first child was just over a year old when a nurse at a Kayole Health Centre looked up from her test results and told her she was five months pregnant.

"I was stunned. That news hit me like a boxer's blow on his opponent's face," Hellen says quietly, seated on a plastic chair in an empty hall, away from the public's eyes or ears.

She didn't feel pregnant. She thought the stomach pains were as a result of long hours of bending over "mountains" of laundry as a mama fua—a woman hired to wash clothes and maybe clean the house—since it had become her daily hustle since she left Kisumu in 2021.

Back then, she was chasing hope. Fleeing heartbreak and disappointment

“I had no one. Not the father of my first child, not a job, just dreams.”
In Nairobi, when life was so hard, she thought, a man would ease her burden. But sooner than later, the man too, left. Leaving behind a desperate Hellen.

“I already had a baby who depended entirely on me. I wasn’t ready. Not physically. Not emotionally. Not financially. Having another child was simply not an option.”
She went knocking on hospital doors, desperately searching for abortion services.

“I was told no. Over and over. Public hospitals said they don’t offer abortion. Private ones quoted prices I could never afford.”
While debating her next move, a friend whispered a name: a traditional herbalist in Soweto known as a “nyamrero”.
“She promised the abortion would work if I paid her Sh6,800,” Hellen recalls.

With nowhere to turn to, Hellen sold her cooking gas cylinder, and then, her subwoofer, and even tricked her mother into sending her some money. After collecting enough funds, the herbalist gave her a concoction and sent her home to wait for the results.

“Then came the pain. Pain that made me scream. Neighbors rushed me to hospital.”

There, judgment came first—before the treatment.

“They asked, ‘Why did you do this to yourself?’ But at least they treated me.”

She stayed in that hospital for a few days.
The day she was discharged, Hellen did not go home to rest. She went searching again—for a way to end the pregnancy.

This time round, she was directed to a compound in Dandora where a woman ran an unofficial clinic at the back of a church backyard.

“She massaged my belly and gave me the same herbal concoction, saying it would work faster. But nothing happened, just excruciating pain, and more screams.”

Again, her neighbors carried her to safety.
The hospital staff, though cold, still admitted her. She needed serious medical attention. But the pregnancy still remained.
By now, she was six months along.

“Despite the months really moving, I just wanted it to end. My mind was made up.”

As soon as she left the hospital, Hellen went back to look for other means of dealing with the unwanted pregnancy. She found another solution, abortion pills, sold to her by a local chemist near her home. She took the pills, hoping that this would finally work.
It didn’t.

Instead, she ended up back in a hospital bed, where doctors had no other option but to hold her up to a point where they felt that the child was ready to come to this world.

At 38 weeks, she was induced into labour.

“They didn’t want to take any chances. I think they knew I would keep trying to end it. That’s how I gave birth—early.”

Her son was born crying. Healthy. Whole. A miracle, despite it all.
Today, Hellen still walks the tough road of single motherhood. Now with two children, and still doing manual jobs to survive. Yet despite the exhaustion, she shows resilience every day; scrubbing clothes to earn a living, holding on to hope that tomorrow may be kinder.
As she watches her baby boy sleep or play on her lap, a question lingers in her mind.

“How did he survive everything I put him through?”
She doesn't say it with pride. She says it with guilt. With awe.

With pain.

“I look at him and wonder: if I had access to safe services… maybe things wouldn’t have gone this way.”
Hellen’s story is not a one-off tale. It's a mirror held up to Kenya’s underbelly, where many women like her fight a war between their choices and a system that refuses to support them.
It’s not a question of morality, but a question of survival, accessibility, safety and dignity of the girls and women in the informal settlements.

STORY 2

FREEDOM WITH A PRICE: MY CAMPUS SECRET

DEBRA,26

There is always some sense of freedom whenever someone joins the university. Away from the parent's watchful eyes where one could experience and experiment life on a different dimension. If you ask many girls, it's after campus that they got boyfriends and even had their first sex encounter.

This is not views or opinions, but the story of Debra,26, and millions of young girls who join campus or college every year.

At the age of 18, Debra, unlike many other girls from the informal settlement, was lucky to have joined the university to pursue her dream course.

"Coming from a poor family, being able to go past high school and actually join university is one of the proudest moments for any family and community. Education is often a collective effort," she says
After settling down at the university she realized that it's a taboo not to have a boyfriend or just a man who will pamper and care for you.

> IN UNIVERSITY, YOU NOTICE EVERYONE SEEMS TO HAVE A BOYFRIEND EXCEPT YOU. SO, YOU DECIDE TO GIVE DATING A TRY, AND THAT'S WHEN YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF IN A HOLE THAT BRINGS YOUR LIFE TO A STANDSTILL

For Debra, this was her predicament when she joined university. And even though she wanted to focus on her studies, pressure from her peers and maybe within herself gave into the nudge to have a man by her side. Being young and naïve, she was not even aware of contraceptive options available for her, leave alone use of condoms.

“To say I was naïve is an understatement. I was clueless about sexual matters. For me to qualify for direct entry to university, I had to stay away from so many things that might have enlightened me on these issues.”
But a few months into the university and her relationship, an unplanned pregnancy stood between her and her dreams.

“When my periods missed, I immediately knew I was pregnant. And when I told my boyfriend, he only said ‘I hope it’s not what I’m thinking it is.’”
Debra was just in her second semester, and coming from a poverty-stricken family, even her education at the university was courtesy of government sponsored funding that offered loans and bursaries to Kenyan students pursuing higher education.

“My boyfriend who was a fourth said he was not ready for a baby, and I was also not ready for a baby. Bringing a baby into this world would have meant cutting short my dreams and I was not financially able to be a parent.”

With not so many alternatives, Debra turned to her friends who advised her on the affordable abortion options that were available for a campus student.

“I couldn’t afford the Sh15,000 and more being asked by health facilities.”
She adds “Since the pregnancy was around two months, I chose to go to a local chemist where the operator inserted a drug up my vagina.”
She only paid Sh1,500 for the medicine. She was then given some painkillers and sent home, where the procedure would have ended.

Within a few hours, Debra started feeling some extreme pain on her abdomen.

“I felt like someone was ripping my stomach with a blunt knife. It was on the night of Christmas, as everyone was out celebrating, I was in the house writhing in pain and I could not tell anyone.”

The pain went on up to morning and Debra had to sneak out of the house to go see her boyfriend with hopes that he will take her to hospital or just “do something.”

Despite seeing her agony, he left her at home and returned hours later with just painkillers, which only helped contain the pain.

However, the medicine didn’t stop the heavy bleeding, which lasted for nearly two months.

“By that time, I had gone back to school, and at the hostel, everyone noticed something was going on because I emanated a foul smell even after just taking a shower.”

She also continued bleeding heavily to a point her friends got worried of her continuous bleeding. But she couldn’t tell anyone her troubles.
“They would advise me to go to hospital, but that would mean telling the doctors what I did. I was ready to die with my secret but not seek help.”

Debra says if only health facilities were friendly, she would not have sought the abortion from an unqualified person the way she did.

> **IF OUR HOSPITALS WERE ACCOMMODATIVE, EVEN IF I HAD NOT GONE FOR THE ABORTION, I WOULD HAVE INSTANTLY SOUGHT HELP TO STOP THE BLEEDING. BUT WHENEVER I THOUGHT OF THE INTRUSIVE QUESTIONS I’LL BE ASKED, I RESORTED TO KEEPING TO MYSELF**

Also, the stigma that follows a person who has undergone abortion is another major reason that Debra and many other girls suffer in silence.

“Imagine even that boyfriend later turned against me and called me a killer and that he couldn’t bear to marry someone who had aborted.”
Debra says these words affected her to a point she almost dropped out of school.

“Were it not for the reminder that I needed to work so hard because I was the hope of my family, I think I would have left school. But the whole thing really affected me mentally and I even contemplated suicide,” she recalls as trail of thoughts steals her mind.

And for many years that followed, Debra had to hide this secret to everyone, including her subsequent boyfriends.

“I later tried getting pregnant but I couldn’t. I once decided to inform one of the men I was engaged to and he instantly dumped me.”

Even though she now has a one-year old baby, Debra confesses that it has taken her a lot of fasting and praying, and just asking God “not to allow for her womb to be damaged.”

“For the years I tried and failed, I had thought my womb had been damaged. And when I got pregnant last year, I was overjoyed.”
Debra’s story highlights the urgent need for accessible sexual and reproductive health services, youth-friendly healthcare, and non-judgmental care, so that no young woman has to suffer in silence or risk her life while navigating her reproductive choices.

STORY 3

BEHIND EVERY CHOICE, THERE'S A STORY YOU HAVEN'T HEARD

KAREN, 24

It was in 2019, when Karen, who was just 19-years old when she learnt that freedom could be a double-edged sword.

It wasn't the kind of freedom that came with turning 18, nor the kind that felt like celebration.

"Mine came with stepping into campus life, away from the watchful eyes of my strict parents, into a world of late nights, parties, and unfamiliar choices," she recalls.

It was in 2019 when her story took a turn.

Joining university with fresh-face and full of hopes, that September, everything felt possible.

"Until I met him, a charming fourth-year student, confident and smooth-talking. The excitement of being noticed by an older student felt like a movie. He was set to graduate soon, but we clicked."

First, campus life was thrilling, and with the new independence, came bold decisions to explore and experiment.

Then December came, and so did the two pink lines on the test. Pregnant.

Then December came, and so did the two pink lines on the test. Pregnant.

"Fear gripped me. I was only three months into campus life. My dreams felt like they were slipping through my fingers."

But he assured her that he'd be there, he'd support her. She clung to that promise.

But by April, after final exams, he was gone. . No goodbyes, just silence.

Karen only found out from his friends that he had left for Kisumu, his home county.

Calls went unanswered. He blocked her.

When she tried calling using her friend's number, he answered. But when he realised it was her, he would disconnect.

Then silence again.

Left alone and heartbroken, reality hit hard.

> My belly was growing and my parents still didn't know. With no money and no support, I finally confided in a close friend, who claimed to know someone who could "help."
> Help? Yes. Help her to procure abortion.
>
> It wasn't free, of course.

But thanks to HELB funds she had secretly saved, Karen managed to gather the Sh 4,500 needed for the procedure.

“Desperation overruled fear. I had heard stories of girls dying from unsafe abortions, but I had no options. Absolutely not. I could not let this pregnancy derail my dreams yet the father disappeared into the horizon...”

When Karen’s friend mentioned that she knew someone who could help, like any other person, she had thought it was a professional doctor. However, the so-called “doctor” operated from a hidden room in a rental house around Mukuru.

"I was then given pills, one to swallow, another one to insert on my vagina, before I was sent home. Maybe he wanted if I was to bleed, I should be bleeding at home. But nothing happened upon taking the drugs. But the pain was intense, crippling. Still, no bleeding. No signs. Just fear.”

A few days later, she returned.

The doctor proposed they try another method. Without thinking twice, she gave into that proposal.

He locked the door, pulled out wired tools and sharp instruments she’d never seen before. “The wires looked like knitting clipart.”

No gloves. No machines. Just pain, pressure, and silence. “Imagine wires made from iron being inserted into vagina and used to pull out the foetus. You scream and no one hears you. You feel like telling the doctor to stop, but you’ve gone far into it to stop.”

Karen clenched her fists as he inserted his hands and used bandages to wipe whatever he could.

He gave her antibiotics, said the rest would "wash out naturally."

But the aftermath was hell.

> TWO MONTHS OF ABNORMAL BLEEDING. MY TONGUE CHANGED IN TEXTURE. I LOST WEIGHT. MY BODY WAS NEVER THE SAME. I WAS HAUNTED NOT JUST BY THE PAIN, BUT THE FACES OF OTHER YOUNG GIRLS WAITING THEIR TURN IN THAT TINY, HIDDEN ROOM.

It was in 2020 when all this happened. She kept it all inside. She blames her naivety in dealing with men, her lack of knowledge in contraceptives, and innocence that led her to trusting her boyfriend.

“When you hear a girl dying while procuring unsafe abortion, don’t judge them. That is their only way out. That pregnancy might be the obstacle between her future, or studies or sanity. Listen to their stories before making conclusions. You’ll be shocked at why many girls, especially on campus, would rather die while terminating the pregnancy using unorthodox means than keeping it.”

And even though they are few, organisations like na “Nena na Binti” or “Aunty Jane” have become a beacon of hope for many young girls looking for safe abortion services.

For example, just through a phone call, Aunty Jane can guide the girl as from when they discover they are pregnant, to even guiding them where to seek any medical help. This not only helps the girl who would obviously be under pressure, it will also dissuade them from seeking unorthodox means of abortions.

Now 24, Karen looks back with strength, not shame.

She finished her Bachelor of Science degree, but the scars, both physical and emotional, still linger.
“I hope what happened five years ago does not hurt my chances of getting pregnant in future.”

She tells her story so that other young girls will know: there are safer ways.

There is power in information. And above all, you are not alone.

STORY 4

THREE TIMES LUCKY, MANY NEVER MAKE IT

JOY, 30

Even though I'm 30 years old, my soul feels much older, as if it has lived a hundred lives, each marked with scars only I can feel.
Sometimes I wonder, if bodies could talk, what would mine say?

Would it whisper about pain, or scream about survival?

They say pain makes you stronger but what kind of strength comes from bleeding alone on a cold floor, praying you don't die at the hands of a village "doctor" who doesn't even know your name?

The first time I got pregnant, I was fresh out of high school.

My uncle would always sneak into my room at night, stealing pieces of me I never got back. He would rape me and threaten me against sharing such information with anyone.

But despite the threats, I would still tell my mum about the sexual abuse, though not directly. But mum never took any action or asked any questions. Her silence felt like a quiet endorsement.

But what could she do? The uncle was the breadwinner, and we were hungry.

And so when I missed my periods, I didn't bother telling her. Afterall, she would do nothing, as usual.

My friends whispered about this woman who "helps girls" bring to an end some of their "unwanted problems".
And just like that, I was introduced into the cold world of an unsafe abortion.

I was scared, of course. I'd heard of girls who bled to death, girls whose wombs were punctured by scary tools, girls who never came back home walking, but in wooden boxes.

But I did. I came back, but not whole. Terminating the pregnancy was the only option I had, but it came with an emotional turmoil. But again, I didn't regret making that decision.

The second time, I wasn't so lucky.

I had been raped again. This time, not by my uncle, but by boys who called it "corrective rape" because I am queer. They said, "We want to show her how sweet men are," and just like that, they took turns raping me.

My community hates people like me. They say we deserve to be "corrected."

They did just that with their fists, with their bodies, with their hate.

I got pregnant again. Still, I couldn't talk to my mum.

She was deep in the church, and always against conversations about sex.

I went back to the same “daktari.”

But this time, something went wrong.

After the unprofessional procedure, I bled for days. From a dark skin, I turned yellow. I collapsed. My lips were dry and cracked, my body empty and achy.
My mother noticed and said I had been bewitched. Church members camped at our home, praying, asting andworshipping.
But, at the back of my mind, I knew what was ailing me. Though silent.

After countless prayers and no change, we finally went to the hospital.

At the hospital, the doctor gave me four drips.

When he asked what had happened, I broke.

I told him everything. He found rotting metal left inside my womb and that the termination had been incomplete.
But the doctor saved my life. Then he turned to my mother and said, “You’re lucky she didn’t die.”
That was my breaking point and my turning point.

I started attending empowerment sessions. I Learned about Gender Based Violence (GBV), rape referrals, and contraceptives.

And for a moment, I forgot about my pain. I held my head higher.

But when I fell into the arms of a man, not for love, but for safety from my identity, I got pregnant again.

He beat me, threatened me. But this time, I was different.

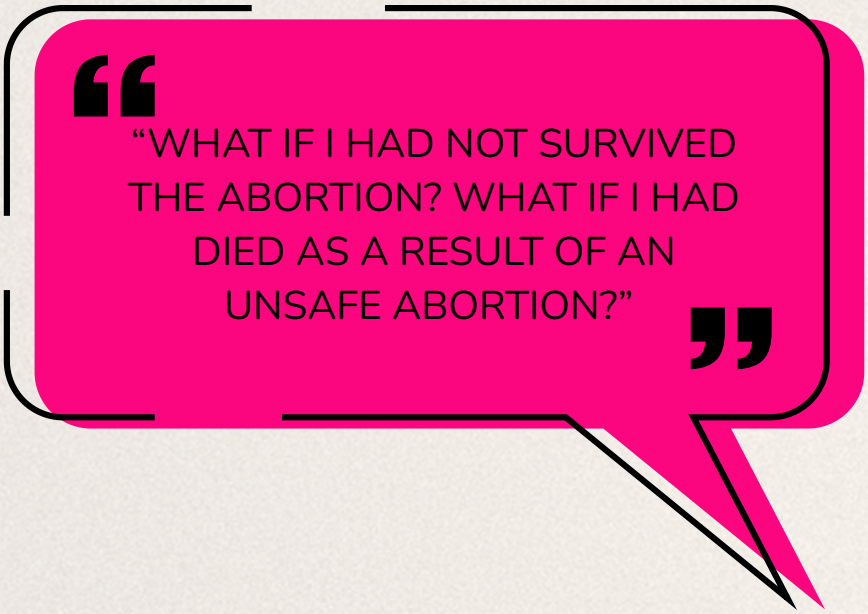
In 2023, I had a safe abortion through a referral I trusted.

That’s when I understood: information is power and empowerment is a weapon.

Today, I talk to girls in Mukuru. We mobilise. We teach. We listen. We cry.

I survived three abortions.

But more than that, I survived silence, shame, and a system that almost killed me.



She wonders...

But what if Kenyan girls are empowered with knowledge on safe abortion. This would be a change in the whole ecosystem, especially for those living in the slums area.

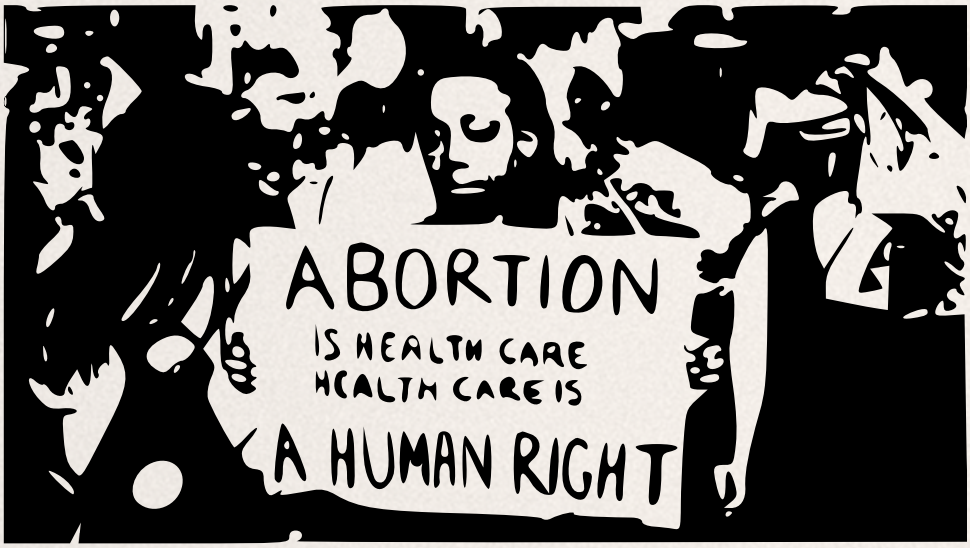
STORY 5

DESPERATION IN A BOTTLE

ANNE, 23

At 17, Anne thought she had met “the one.”

A 23-year-old man from Kibra, smooth-talking and generous at first.



He made her feel like a woman, not just another girl from Mashimoni village, in the crowded area of Kibra.

“I’ll take care of you,” he used to whisper as he handed her small gifts, a few coins here and there, and attention that made her heart skip.

But one missed period changed everything.

"I was only in Form One, young and still learning how the world works. When I told him about the pregnancy, expecting that same soft voice and promise of support, he looked at me like a stranger and said, ‘That’s not my child. Stop being a prostitute!’ The words cut deeper than anything I'd ever heard. Then came the silence. He blocked me, disappeared, leaving me alone, confused, and terrified," she confesses.

Anne reveals that she couldn’t let her mum find out.

She was already doing everything on her own, raising her and her siblings in a small-roomed house, battling pressure and asthma, and working any job she could find.

Anne was then forced into “helping herself.” She looked for a job, a casual one such as washing clothes for other people, fetching water for them, all this with an aim of raising Sh2,500.

That money, though small, stood between her and freedom of being a young mother. However, even though it was meant to “fix” her mistake, it ended up buying her pain and a story that she will never forget.

"I shared with someone that I wanted to terminate the pregnancy and I was referred to a man who owned a chemist and I thought he was a professional doctor only for me to realise later that he was actually a quack. He gave me two pills: One light yellow to place under my tongue, and a white one to insert in my vagina.”

“I remember everything. The bitter taste under my tongue. The way my stomach twisted and cramped until I could barely stand. The bleeding. The fear. The isolation. For three days, I was locked up in my house, praying I wouldn’t die. ‘I just wanted it to be over,’ I told myself, curling up in bed, refusing to eat."

No one knew. Not her mum. Not her siblings.

Only one of her mum’s friends found out later.

After bleeding for close to a week, it finally came to an end. With a sigh of relief, Anne knew life had given her a second chance.

BEFORE EVENTUALLY ENDING THE PREGNANCY, I HAD FIRST TRIED TO INDUCE AN ABORTION AT HOME BY DRINKING A MIXTURE OF WASHING POWDER AND DETERGENT AND ALSO TAKING 10 PANADOL TABLETS, BUT NOTHING HAPPENED. THAT’S WHEN I DECIDED TO SEEK HELP ELSEWHERE. EVEN THOUGH I SUCCEEDED, IT’S SOMETHING I WOULD NEVER DO AGAIN.

“I wish more people who’ve gone through unsafe abortions had the courage to share their stories. Maybe then, it would discourage other girls from taking that dangerous path and encourage them to seek professional help instead.”

And years later, at 21, Mary got pregnant again. But this time, she chose to keep the baby.

Maybe it was guilt, maybe it was trauma, maybe it was strength.

But she couldn't go through that pain again.

"I remembered the panadols, the detergent mixtures for the failed attempts, the cramps with taking such things. I remembered sleeping through the pain, hoping that when I woke up, it would all be over and I would still be alive," she says.

But it wasn’t.

Because the real aftermath came in silence, the shame, the pretending, the rebuilding.

Her mum chased her away for a while when she found out about the second pregnancy.

But Anne didn’t crumble. She got a small job, found a cheap room, and kept moving.

And now at 23, she says this boldly: "If I knew a safer abortion method, I would have used it.”

But Anne comforts herself: “At least I survived the ordeal. And that’s no small miracle.”

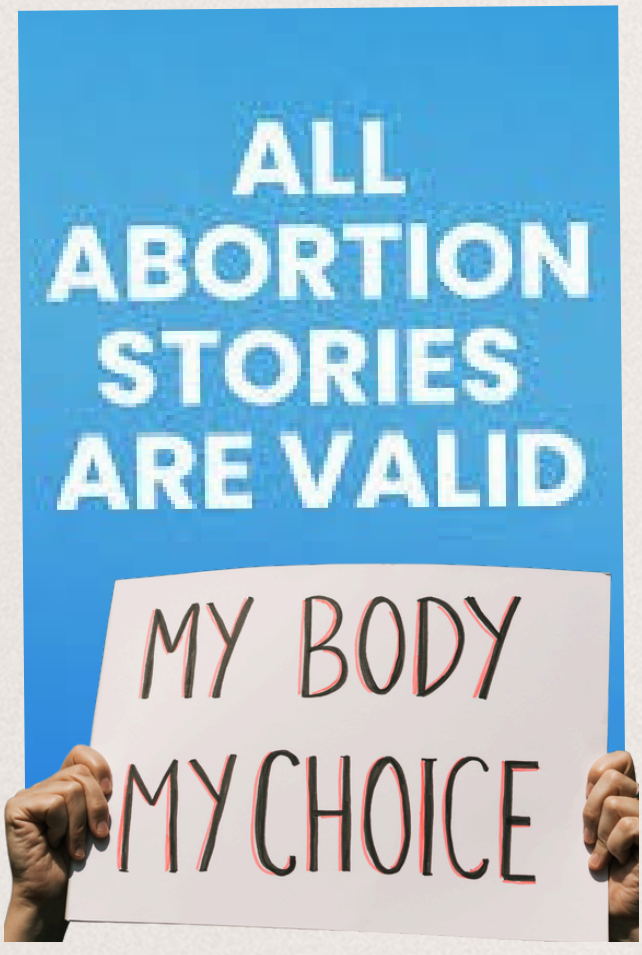
STORY 6

WHAT I FEARED BECAME MY TURNING POINT

MOLLY, 23

After years, I can now finally admit it out loud: I had an abortion. The irony? I never wanted it, but Phweks! I thank God it happened.

I was 19-years old, in my second year of campus, still figuring out how to navigate life without my mum breathing down my neck.



And yet, it was my own mother who forced me into a decision that changed my life forever.

It was a Friday evening when my secret was uncovered.

The pregnancy test had turned positive a week earlier, but I'd kept the news locked inside me.

I was scared, but not ashamed.

Kelvin, my first love and first everything, had promised we'd figure it out. And since I was staying in the hostel, I knew my secret would remain under the wraps, maybe even until delivery.

I was barely two months along, but in my heart, I was already a mother.

But then I made a mistake. To go home, where my mum with her "African microscopic eyes" knew I was pregnant the moment she laid her eyes on me.

To her, I wasn't her scared teenage daughter but a stain on her holy reputation.

The next day, she chased me out. Literally. At 10pm. Pregnant. Alone. No money. No phone charge.

Just the cold night and the betrayal of the woman who raised me.

I slept outside, tears soaking into my scarf, wondering if I had become invisible to the God she claimed to serve.

Sunday morning, she opened the door like nothing had happened.

She told me to shower and go to church. And I was asking God to take away all my troubles, I was expected to also ask Kelvin for Sh7,000 which was to be used in terminating the pregnancy. I vehemently opposed that decision. I wanted to keep my baby.

But Kelvin was just a campus boy too. We had dreams, not savings.

He didn't send the money. He didn't even pick my calls that night because he was probably out with the boys, clubbing and having fun as I suffered alone.

And so, my mum dragged me to a nearby health facility. A scan confirmed, I was indeed seven weeks pregnant.

That detail will forever be branded in my memory.

At seven weeks, there were two heartbeats.

I cried silently, hoping someone would look into my eyes and say, "You don't have to do this."

But no one did.

My mum's friend recommended pills since the pregnancy was still tiny.

Since it was a safe abortion, the process was quick and clean.

However, the pain still came in waves, and it took me a while before my periods returned to normal. Physically, I healed. Emotionally? That's another story..

Physically, I healed. Emotionally? That's another story.

For months, I hated my mum. We barely spoke.

I was furious that no one had allowed me to feel and decide, only to act.

And yet, years later, as I look at the life I've rebuilt, I find myself whispering; thank you.

It wasn't my decision, but it saved me from a deeper mess.

Kelvin and I broke up three months later.

I'm now a teacher and had I kept the pregnancy, I'd probably be a single mum of twins, broke, maybe even in the streets or doing things I wouldn't be proud of, just to survive.

I still don't encourage abortion. But I encourage safety. And choice. If you have to, go for the safer option. Choose your life. Also, sometimes, you might not understand why, but trust your intuitions.
When you see a parent doing what my mother did, try to understand where they are coming from.. Today, I completely understand my mum opted to take me for that abortion, instead of leaving me as a teenage mother.

I didn't have a choice but I survived.

And now, I tell my story so someone else doesn't have to survive in silence.

STORY 7

FROM INNOCENCE TO INSANITY

SOPHIE, 18

Turning 18 years is magical for anyone. This age comes with a sense of freedom, and the urge to try out some new things, those that you've been dreaming of doing all your life.

This was the feeling that Sophie experienced as soon as she turned the age that ushers one into adulthood. Also, she had just completed her secondary school studies, and she had all the freedom she had always desired for.

"In school, everyone talked about their sex experiences, but I was able to hold on until when I cleared school. And so there was no harm in experiencing intimacy for the first time after Form Four."

But Sophie was not ready for the sexual activities with her boyfriend. She had zero knowledge on protection, contraceptive or even safe days, just like millions of girls in Kenya, whom the health policies and the education system have denied them the right to information on contraceptives and sexual reproductive health. "No one was there to tell me anything about sex, or how to protect myself."

This lack of knowledge made her first sexual experience terrible. “I didn’t enjoy it completely, maybe it's because it was my first time.”
But it's from that incident that Sophie got pregnant. She never planned for the pregnancy, all she wanted was to experience sex, as a young woman. “It was just a few minutes thing and I got pregnant,” Sophie quips amid some soft laugh.

Sophie lived with her elder brother who served as her guardian since their mum lived in the upcountry. She alongside her younger sister, the brother, his wife and their children shared a two-roomed iron-sheet house. Breaking the news of her pregnancy would likely have earned her a ticket out of the family house. She could not risk it. Also, the boyfriend expressed fears of not being ready to be a father. This clearly proved that whatever decision Sophie made, she was on her own.

“Presented with no choice, I settled for the pregnancy termination.”
Sophie being a more interactive person, in her quest to search for ways of dealing with her situation, she came across a social worker who upon sharing her predicament with, she said that she knew a health facility that would offer the services at an affordable rate, and in some cases, free of charge.

> THAT WAS NEWS TO ME. IN THE SLUMS, WE ARE USED TO BACKSTREET METHODS OF TERMINATING THE PREGNANCY LIKE DRINKING HERBS.

This is the reason why at first, Sophie doubted the intentions of this social worker. “I even asked whether she’s not planning on handing me over to the police. But she assured me that everything will work out well.”

Also, the thoughts of losing her life after the procedure also occupied part of mind, whenever she thought of it.
With the pregnancy growing every day, she had to put aside her fears and just go for it.

Unlike the clandestine methods used by unprofessional facilities, at this specific facility, she was first examined to determine if the pregnancy was safe to terminate or not. Once they confirmed it was safe, she was taken through counselling to ascertain her psychological strength, during and after the procedure.

“The procedure was so smooth and less painful. Within an hour, the pregnancy had been terminated and I was ready to go home.”

Sophie is glad she didn’t bleed too much nor experience any severe pains. But what would have happened if Sophie had decided to keep the pregnancy.

She said “Remember I had just completed secondary school. And so when the results came out, I had qualified to join university and my previous sponsors who had educated me through primary and secondary school were to continue sponsoring me. If I had not terminated the pregnancy, the sponsorship would have been taken away and I will be left behind being a mother.”

Sophie’s experience underscores the importance of safe, legal, and accessible reproductive healthcare. Because she was treated by a professional health worker in an appropriate medical facility, she avoided the life-threatening risks that thousands of Kenyan women face each year.

She is thankful not to have endured complications, permanent injury, or even mortality that far too many women suffer after unsafe abortions. But Sophie’s experience is not unique to her only. The struggles of being a young person who lacks basic knowledge on sex matters, and further lacks information on the borderlines between safe and unsafe abortion affect millions of girls in Kenya. This is basically due to the existing gaps in the policies which prevents underaged Kenyans from accessing information and even reproductive health services.

Sophie’s story is a wake up call for policy inclusivity especially of the young people whom the government’s policies have continued to alienate them.

STORY 8

I WANTED TO DO IT RIGHT

YUSRA, 21

At the age of 21, peer pressure pushed Yusra to get herself a boyfriend, just like many other girls of her age in the Mukuru kwa Njenga.

After clearing Form Four, it was every girl's wish to love and be loved, to be pampered, and get the princess treatment.

Yusra then found herself a man she believed would be her savior.
"To tell the truth, I was over the moon with how the guy treated me, or maybe I was just naïve."

She would sneak out of her home to go see the man. Being young and inexperienced,, both protection and family planning were not part of the equation in their intimacy.

“And then one time, my period missed.I don’t know what I was expecting when I had sex without protection,” says the bubbly Yusra, chuckling in a way that shows both how silly she felt at the time and her lingering uncertainties.

Yusra knew there was no chance that she could keep the baby because of the life she grew up in, and the situation at home.

“I grew up in Mukuru kwa Njenga where a family of three crumbled up in a single-roomed house made of mud and iron sheets, with only our mother.”.” Growing in such circumstances meant that the resources were neither available and the family had to struggle every day, to even afford a single meal.

“My family was so poor that we had to depend on sponsors to fund our education,” Yusra reveals, her voice shrinking as she remembers the situation back home.With all these circumstances, alongside the fact that she had just cleared form four and still hoped to proceed to college, it was clear that she had to procure an abortion.

Even though her boyfriend opposed it, Yusra knew the decision solely lied with her. After all, it was her life that would be affected if she brought a child into the world.“He attempted to make me change my mind, but my mind was made up. I could not afford making my mother know that I was pregnant because it would have broken her.”

Even though she knew she wanted an abortion, she also knew she wanted the safest option available: Something that, in a place like Mukuru, felt like a mere dream. At first, the only alternatives were medicine bought from a local chemist or going to a quack doctor where her safety and her life would never be guaranteed. “All I wanted was a safe abortion conducted by a professional health provider.”

Sure enough, she was able to meet a young community advocacy champion who connected her to a facility that helped her procure the abortion without paying a single dime.

Contrary to what she believed or thought, the procedure was so seamless and smooth. She used a medical method where she undertook the drug and waited at the hospital as the procedure started.

“Even as I sat in that facility waiting for the miscarriage to happen, I could not stop asking God to forgive me, and not allow me to die. I had seen how families of girls who died during unsafe abortions were treated with contempt in society, and I didn’t want my family to go through that.” Lucky enough, she survived the ordeal, not by sheer luck, but because of how safe the procedure was.

Yusra terms herself among the lucky girls who were able to have access to safe abortion.

“If I’m to count the number of my friends or girls I know who died from unsafe abortion, the list would be endless. Unsafe abortion is what is available in the slums.”

Yusra says “One thing that helped me is the fact that I knew I wanted a safe abortion, and I’m glad I met people who pointed me in the right direction; and it’s all because I’m somehow educated. But what about those girls who are illiterate and desperate? More girls and women will continue losing their lives as a result of unsafe abortion. That’s why things need to change.

ONE THING THAT HELPED ME IS THE FACT THAT I KNEW I WANTED A SAFE ABORTION, AND I’M GLAD I MET PEOPLE WHO POINTED ME IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION; AND IT’S ALL BECAUSE I’M SOMEHOW EDUCATED. BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE GIRLS WHO ARE ILLITERATE AND DESPERATE?

STORY 9

LIVING IN FEAR OF MY OWN BODY

OLIVER, 29

Even though many years have gone by after procuring her first abortion, the traumatizing events of unsafe abortion continue to haunt, occupying a portion of her life, and even scaring her from taking major important steps in her life.

And despite growing up from just being a young naïve girl to a now knowledgeable woman, Oliver's past seems to be following her around and has continued to traumatize her to the core.
"In 2012, when I was just 17 years old, circumstances forced me to a come-we-stay marriage with a man who looked like someone who could provide for me."

This decision was more likely fueled by the fact that she grew up in a poverty-filled family, that a marriage proposal became the best option. Months later, she got pregnant, and upon informing the husband about the pregnancy, the man gave her an ultimatum of either leaving his house, or procuring an abortion.

HE TOLD ME "I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO, BUT I DON'T WANT TO SEE THAT THING GROWING IN YOUR STOMACH

If she had options, she would have thought twice of what action to take. But upon soul-searching, she realized that abortion was the only option she had, as a young woman who was not economically empowered or had a place to run to.

Upon asking her friends, one of them referred her to an old woman outside their village who upon confirming the pregnancy, she concluded that the pregnancy which at three months old was still young and therefore the process will be easy and fast.

“She made some bitter herbs and gave me five liters of it which I was to drink five cups a day until the termination happens.”

“And true to her words, two days later, I started spotting blood, meaning the pregnancy had terminated before I started bleeding profusely. Then the bleeding went from just a day to a week, and in the second week, there were no signs of its ending.”

And then, her skin tone started changing, from just being dark skin, to first, ashy black and then yellowish colour. This is when she realized that the situation was not fine as she had assumed.

Upon going back to the woman who had given her the herbs, all she said was “I can’t help you, just go back home and wait for the bleeding to stop by itself.”

With no alternatives, she went back home, full of hopes that the bleeding would eventually fizzle out. However, one day, a month later, she found herself too weak to even walk to the toilet. All she remembers is reaching out to her phone, calling her friend before passing out, and waking up in a hospital a few days later.

“When I woke up, a doctor asked me “why did you want to kill yourself?” I told him it’s the pressure I was going through at home and that I had no money to do it the right way.”
It’s after the treatment that the doctors realized the extensive damage that was caused by the unprofessional way of terminating a pregnancy.

“The doctors informed me that my womb was damaged as a result of excessive bleeding. Even though they said it was just temporary, they obviously said that to console me.”

The reality came dawning on her two years later in 2014 when she got pregnant again. And even though she had all the intentions to keep the baby, she had to depend on daily drugs, as her womb had been declared “too weak to hold a child”.

“When I was three months pregnant, I had these severe pains in the abdomen and when I went to the hospital, a gynecologist told me the existence of my child depends on the medicine she would be prescribed and that, the moment I stop taking them, that will be it.”
One day when she was around six months old, she forgot to take the medicine. And that’s how she ended up in the labour room giving birth to a preterm baby.

“My baby was the tiniest thing I had ever seen, but he survived after staying in the incubator for close to a month.”
Even though she had received her bundle of joy, this instilled fear of ever carrying a pregnancy to its full time.
“I’m now so afraid of even getting pregnant. The other child survived, what if the next one doesn’t? What if my womb has gotten more to a point it can’t even hold a baby-with or without the drugs?” Oliver wonders loudly as she takes a deep breath.
Aside from the reproductive consequences, Oliver also cannot handle heavy tasks or even lift heavy luggage, as such action could lead to excessive bleeding.

And even as she fights her traumas and fears, she can’t stop thinking how her life would be if the abortion services were safe at the time she needed them the most, and how life would have turned out for her.
“If safe abortion services had been accessible when I needed them, maybe I would have had more planned children. Maybe my womb would be fine. Maybe my life would be different, just like any other woman.”
Oliver’s story is one just one of the many especially for who lack resources that could enable them seek these abortion services at a professional facility, away from the societal judgment.

STORY 10

GROWING UP FAST IN MY FATHER'S SHADOW

MICHELLE,15

Her tiny frame and smiley face might fool you thinking she's a happy girl. At the age of 15, like any teen, Michelle should have been enjoying her teenage years regardless of her humble background, having grown up in Laini Sabaa slums, Kibra.

You'd think being raised by a single parent is hard, but try being a girl

raised by a single strict father, who doesn't even know what a pad looks like, let alone how to comfort a crying daughter.

My mother? I've never even seen her face. She disappeared like smoke in the wind, and no one ever talked about her.

So, it's been just me and Dad, well, mostly just me, because he's either working or too angry at the world to notice I even existed.

People always assume fathers and daughters have some magical bond. But not us. My dad never talked. He would just command.

When I had my first period, I was too scared to ask for help.
Would he understand? What do you say to a man who doesn't even care that you exist?
I found answers from the wrong people.

Some girls in my area lived a great life. They could afford the latest fashion clothes, they could afford “expensive” lotions and bathing soaps. I mean, for the majority of underprivileged girls from slums, some of these things that might be perceived as basic are considered “luxuries” and we longed for just that.

I asked what their secret was, and they told me: men. Not boyfriends.

Grown men with “fat” wallets and could provide. By slums standards.

At just 14, I started going to places I shouldn't have been, parties filled with too many secrets and too little shame.The parties came with having sex in exchange for gifts and some little amount of money.

I was just a little girl trying to feel normal.

Then one night, everything went wrong.

Do you know how terrifying it is to miss your period when you're 14?

To vomit your guts out and hear your dad say coldly, "You're pregnant," as if he’s predicting the weather?

I told a friend, older, 19, wiser in all the wrong ways. She knew someone.

A woman who dealt with such "situations."

We visited her. She handed me pills, one to place inside my private part, one to swallow six hours later.

No scan. No warning. Just a dim room and false hope.

Then the pains started. Cramps. High temperatures. Then bleeding. I bled like I was dying. I screamed.

A few days later, I was still bleeding. Then one day, it was extremely painful that I lost consciousness. My neighbour-friend carried me to the hospital.

I had turned pale-green. At the hospital, I could hear the nurses whispering. I was slipping. Life was slowly leaving my body.

The doctor looked at me with disappointment, not concern. The nurse's eyes had already found me guilty and convicted me to a life sentence. But then, I survived.

Dad found out later. He didn't cry. He didn't ask if I was okay.

He just looked at me and said, "You're just as useless as your mother."

That broke me more than the abortion. But here I am, alive, in Grade 8, rebuilding.

It wasn't easy. Community eyes followed me then, and they still do, like a curse. "That girl who aborted." "That shameful one."

But what option did I have at that time? With the situation at home, where would I've taken the baby if I had not terminated the pregnancy.

I know it was an unsafe method, but when that 's the only option you have, death becomes your only fear, but you also prepare for it.

Although I learnt my lesson, one thing remains unchanged. My fellow girls are engaging in early sex. Then pregnancy. Then unsafe abortion, which is affordable and accessible. Here, you might survive or die.

> **I survived to tell my story, I hope people in power will hear our cries and understand us. We need more education on reproductive health. We need lessons on unsafe and safe abortion.**

For me, I'm learning. I'm growing.

My dream? To be a judge. I want to sit in a courtroom, in power, not shame.

I want to show girls like me that one mistake isn't the end.

That pain can plant purpose. So yes,I fell. But guys, I am rising.

STORY 11

THE GHOSTS OF MY CHOICES STILL VISIT ME

SHERIFFA, 18

When you grow up in a family of 11, raised by a single mother in a one-room iron-sheet house, you learn quickly not to add more weight on her shoulders. My mother's income could barely feed us. Adding another child to that space felt impossible.

The tiny one-roomed house made from iron sheets could obviously not accommodate an extra head, and my mother's income couldn't cater for an extra human being.

So, when I got pregnant, I knew my life was doomed. . .
I had been in that relationship for just six months when I realized that I was pregnant.

I was in form three then. I had entered a relationship with a married man, hoping he would help me get some of the things we lacked at home, especially personal items.

With a single mother raising 11 children, there were many things she simply couldn't provide. That's how I landed in a married man's arms.
I was in Form Three then.

The man refused to use condoms, saying they were a sign of disloyalty. Six months later, I was pregnant. Finding that I was pregnant wasn't easy for me.

Sheriffa tested not once, or twice, but thrice and in three different hospitals before reality dawned on her that she was indeed pregnant. "I knew I had to terminate the pregnancy," she says with certainty on her face.
And that's how I found myself at the back of a "chemist" with a man who pretended to be a doctor. He gave me a drug that I took, and a few hours later, the bleeding started.

I bled. Not even a pad could help. The sharp pains on my abdomen area drained all the energy from my whole being. I became weak. My skin became pale. But that couldn't stop the bleeding.

My poor mother? The whole time, she thought it was my normal menstruation. She even decided to take me to the hospital for a check-up.
At the hospital, I requested the doctor to tell her to step-out for a doctor-patient moment. I had too. I couldn't lie to the doctor. But I was not going to reveal "my secret" in front of my mother. I'm glad that the doctor understood me and he gave drugs that would have stopped the bleeding.

But that was not the case. Two weeks after the attempt, I was still bleeding. A friend told me it was likely that the termination procedure hadn't been successful. I also had a nauseating smell coming from my private parts. This made me scared of sitting next to people because I thought they would notice the odor.

I then decided to go back to the "doctor" who this time round, decided to take matters in his own hands.
He inserted the tablets inside me, by himself.

And two hours later, the pain started. And then the bleeding. The blood would come in the form of clots. Even a diaper couldn't help.

While all this was happening and the pain ravaged through my nerves, all I prayed for was to survive the ordeal. I asked God to give me another chance because it was out of desperation that I went for unsafe abortion.

Three weeks later, the bleeding ended and life continued. But the healing journey was never a smooth run for Sheriffa, especially since she was still a school going girl.

I was in form three and when I resumed school, there was this topic on the reproductive system that triggered me. The teacher would insist on how abortion, and especially those done under unprofessional circumstances could damage ones' reproductive system and ruin any chances of getting children in the future.

It felt like the teacher was telling me that my chances of having children in the future were very slim.

I would dash to the toilet where I would cry my eyes out.
So many thoughts ran inside my mind. What if my womb had totally been damaged? What if I'm still smelling? What if the bleeding comes back? What if people know about it?

All these worries have caused me a major mental anguish. All this would not have happened if I had gone to an equipped health facility where I would have been handled by a professional health worker. I would not be worrying about not having children in the future. I would have been comfortable knowing that a professional handled me with great care.

And that's why it's important for the government to save women from the claws of unprofessional doctors by providing safe options, instead of sitting on the fence and waiting for the woman or girl to go hospital for post-abortion-care services after a botched abortion.

“We cannot deny young people information around contraceptives, and further deny them abortion services when they need them.”

The cost of providing safe abortion is far cheaper compared to the cost of raising an unplanned child, and this is what the government needs to think about.

STORY 12

THE SILENT PAIN NO ONE TALKS ABOUT

GLORIA, 24

“When people talk about pregnancy termination, they rarely talk about how painful it is,” these are the exact words of Gloria, a 24 year old woman who underwent abortion two years ago.

While she blames her naivety and cluelessness on contraception and usage of condoms, she also apportioned part of the blame on her lack of knowledge around sexual matters.

In 2023, Gloria ventured into the dating world. She knew she was young and inexperienced, but she wondered how she could gain that experience if she kept herself isolated. “I asked myself ‘what is the worst that could happen if I started dating.’ After all, I was an adult.”

For lack of knowledge, Gloria and her partner would use the “withdrawal” method as a form of family planning, not knowing it might one day backfire on them.

“The man used to assure me that it's the safest method in the world and I believed him,” Gloria reveals, laughing it off.
And then, her periods were delayed. She began experiencing all the classic signs of pregnancy.

“You know that moment when you Google pregnancy symptoms, and it’s everything you’re experiencing?”

A pregnancy test confirmed her fears. Upon passing the news to her boyfriend, the man said “he was not ready to be a father.” Gloria immediately felt alone in a dark and frightening place.

She could not afford bringing an additional cost to her parents who were already struggling to provide for her and her siblings. “I could not even dare to tell them that I was pregnant and so I needed a quick fix to that problem.”

Upon consulting her cousin and informing her that she was thinking of terminating the pregnancy, she took her to a single-roomed chemist in Kwa Ruben, that served as a pharmacy and at the back of it, a clinic. It is at the clinic where everything such as “examination” of the pregnancy and termination happened. Since her pregnancy was still below 12 weeks, she was given some medicine which she took and later went home.

“After three hours, the pain that took over my body can’t be explained. I was bleeding heavily, the blood looked like big chunks of liver. I was vomiting, my temperature was so high and all I could see was death close by.”

She confesses that this was extreme, at one point, she started saying her last prayers, knowing that she’ll be dying soon, but she survived to tell the story.

Good thing, Gloria had her cousin by her side who was looking after her. “I could not have done it at my parents’ house since they would have found out.”

Gloria grew up hearing the term “flashing the pregnancy,” a term popularly used to mean the termination of the pregnancy. “This then made the procedure look or sound so normal and easy.

> WHAT THEY DON’T SAY IT’S HOW IT IS. THEY DON’T TELL US HOW RISKY IT IS IF SOMEONE GOES FOR AN UNSAFE ABORTION.

She confesses that the majority of the girls and women in the informal settlement go for backstreet doctors because they are cheaper and more available.

In such facilities, no questions are asked, just business and you go, unlike formal clinics that conduct careful assessments with a series of questions. “If society could remove all these barriers, we would save so many lives.”

STORY 13

WHEN FAITH AND FEAR COLLIDE

MISHI, 23

Mishi, a 23-year-old still wonders how one begins to tell a story that still keeps them awake at night. How do you speak of choices that tore at your soul, decisions made when love, religion, and desperation stood like three walls around you? How?

decisions made when love, religion, and desperation stood like three walls around you? How?

She thought she knew him, the man who called her his future, who promised to cross faith and family lines just to marry her.

But sometimes, the people who hold your hand are the very ones who let it go when you need them the most.

"I met him when I was 20. He was responsible, caring, and made me believe in forever. Two years together had convinced me that this was it. I lied to my family just to spend time with him, sacrificed even not joining college. When I found out I was pregnant at 22, I was scared but also strangely happy," she reveals.

She knew he would provide, just as he always had.
He was away at the time, but when he returned a week later, Mishi shared the news with a hopeful heart. His reaction was the first crack in the dream she had built.

He told her the pregnancy could not continue because he was a Christian and Mishi was a Muslim.

Religion had never been a problem before, but suddenly, it was everything.

The man who once promised to convert to Islamfor her, now spoke only of ending the life growing inside Mishi.

"I resisted at first. Fear and faith fought inside me. I had no supportive family to turn to. My mother, a single parent, was already stretched thin caring for my 13-year-old sister who has cerebral palsy. Her medications and diapers drained every coin. Could I really add another child to that struggle?"

Weeks passed, and her indecision turned into surrender.

He took her to a chemist within Kibra and paid for abortion pills.

"Instructions were simple: Place one under the tongue, insert the other inside me. Then my ‘ride or die’ stepped outside, saying he’d be back. He never returned. That was the last time I saw his face."

Going back home, Mishi locked herself in her room, guilt eating her away even before the pills began their work.

In her faith, abortion is a grave sin, and she could already feel the weight of being a murderer in God’s eyes.

And then, the agony started. The pain? It came in waves, harsher than any period cramps.

> **I SQUATTED OVER A BASIN, THE AGONY RIPPING A SCREAM FROM MY THROAT WHEN IT WAS OVER. THAT’S WHEN MY MOTHER AND HER SISTERS RUSHED IN, REALISING WHAT HAD HAPPENED, THEY RUSHED ME TO HOSPITAL.**

The hospital lights blurred into view as she woke up with drips in her arm.

Her mother’s voice was sharp with questions, pain, and disbelief. But nothing she said was harsher than the voice in Mishi’s head especially when she remembers about the pain she endured due to the unsafe abortion.

"If I’d been better informed about sexual and reproductive health, I might have avoided the situation I ended up in. It’s a taboo topic in our schools, but why? Imagine how many young lives could be saved if safe abortion services were accessible and girls were empowered with the knowledge to protect themselves."

Even though Mishi is coming to terms with the situation, she can’t stop thinking about the future.

Does she worry about the future? Absolutely.
"Sometimes I wonder—what if the unsafe procedure harmed my ability to have children one day? That fear haunts me. It’s even made me pull away from relationships, because I’m scared of what the future might hold."
Until access to comprehensive sexuality education is guaranteed, many young women will continue to suffer in silence.

STORY 14

I CHOSE LIFE OVER SOCIETAL APPROVAL

MARY, 22

At the age of 22, I never thought a single month could change the rest of my life.

In 2022, just after sitting for my Form Four exams, I met someone.

Young, charming, and full of sweet promises, he seemed like the escape I didn't know I needed.

But barely a month into our love story, the news hit me: I was pregnant.

At eighteen, with a strict mother at home, my heart pounded with fear instead of joy.

I knew if she found out, her disappointment would crush me.

I turned to a friend for advice, hoping she would have a solution that wasn't too frightening.

She told me about different "methods" she had heard of like drinking washing detergent or swallowing concentrated juice to end the pregnancy.
I was too scared to try either, but when she offered to take me to a woman who "helped girls," I instantly agreed.

I didn't know that walking into that hidden house would feel like walking straight into my own death.

Have you ever had pain so deep that you scream until your voice cracks, but no one comes to help?

That's what it felt like when the old woman pulled out a crochet needle, the kind used for sewing, and wrapped it tightly in her hand.

She told me to be still, then pushed it inside me.

The pain was unbearable, like knives tearing through my insides.

I cried, screamed, begged her to stop, but my voice was swallowed by the thick walls of that small, hidden room.

Blood poured out of me.

When it was over, she handed me the remains in a paper bag and told me to throw it wherever I wished.

I walked home crying, each step heavier than the last.

Within days, my skin turned pale and my body grew weaker. Something was wrong.

The old woman hadn't removed everything. My stomach carried deadly clots.

Fear finally drove me back to my mother. To my surprise, she didn't shout.

She simply gathered some of her friends and rushed me to a clinic, where a health worker pulled out the rest.

It was still painful, but nothing compared to the horror of that backroom.

The boy who got me pregnant? He was just twenty.

He rejected me without a second thought.

The whispers in my village became louder than my own heartbeat.

Even when other girls dumped babies in trenches, the blame somehow still fell on me.

I hid indoors for days, swallowed by shame and isolation.

Two years later, I have a six-month-old baby and a partner, though he doesn't know about the abortion.

My child survived my fears, my past, and my guilt.

But I think of the girls here in Kibra, most of them unaware of safe abortion methods, trapped by poverty, stigma and silence.

I think of my friend in Form Three who drank some liquid to end her pregnancy and never woke up.

If I could speak to every girl standing where I once stood, I'd tell them this: Don't risk your life.

> **EVEN IF THE WORLD SEEMS READY TO JUDGE YOU, OPENLY ASKING FOR ABORTION SERVICES IS FAR BETTER THAN GAMBLING WITH DEATH IN A STRANGER'S HANDS.**

The scars, both seen and unseen never fade.

STORY 15

AFTER THE VIOLATION CAME THE SILENCE

JOAN, 27

In 2019, her mother had rebuked her for getting pregnant out of wedlock, and still living under their roof in squalid houses of Mukuru kwa Ruben. Getting pregnant again, and having to return to her mother's house, felt like it would be a suicidal mission.

In 2023 November, just when the holiday mood was starting to kick-off, and the "sherehe" mood was setting off, Joan, 27, was not left behind. Having hustled so hard for more than 300 days, she and her friends felt they deserved a little partying.

"One Friday that November, my friends and I set out to enjoy ourselves, leaving my four years old daughter under my mother's care."

The night went so well that she forgot about the rules set by her parents, where no one should come to school past 9 p.m.

" It only hit me when it was around 3 a.m. There was no way I was going home at that time."

What options did she have? Squatting at her friends' homes. However, none of the female friends were willing to accommodate her at their homes, because, like any other family living in the slums, there was no extra space to accommodate an extra person. Only the male friends were willing to allow her into their homes.
Joan ended up going home with one of the male friends who she believed stayed alone.

"At home, he allowed me to sleep on his bed because the house was empty and there was no other place I could lie on aside from the bed." Little did Joan know, the man she trusted as a friend had other ill intentions.

As soon as Joan closed her eyes did she start feeling cold hands crawling through the sheets and on her body. At first, she thought it was a mere mistake that the man placed his hands on her body since they were sharing the bed. A few minutes later, the hands again crawled through her thighs.

This put her alert on notice. She sat down on the bed with all the intentions to confront the man and ask him to stop whatever he was trying to do.
"But before I could even open my mouth, he pinned me down and lifted my dress."

Joan fought back to resist, by kicking the man, biting his hands and just attempting to escape. "All those efforts were in vain. The man said I should either 'relax and enjoy it' or he'll use force and it will be painful."
Left with no options and fearing for her safety, Joan dissociated, blocking her mind from the assault. As the sun started rising, Joan walked home, draped in shame and disgrace.

"As I walked home, I felt like everyone knew what had happened." Before going home, she went to a nearby chemist where she bought a morning-after-pill, hoping that it would salvage the situation.

But the worst part was to come. Two weeks after the incident, she started experiencing signs of being pregnant. Her worries were made worse after her periods which were always regular were also delayed.

“To confirm my fears, I tested, and it came out positive. I wasn’t expecting the duo lines on the testing kit.”

She went back to inform the man but he turned out to be so aggressive against her.

“He said he was not ready to have another child with another woman since he was already married and had children with his wife who lived in the rural home.”

I agreed to terminate the pregnancy. Since the pregnancy was still four weeks old, she opted to use some drugs given to her at a local chemist, where she inserted one tablet on her vagina and the other one was placed under her tongue. The first attempt, nothing happened. She had to go back to the same chemist operator who again gave her the same tablets, but this time, it worked.

That night, Joan endured stabbing cramps and profuse bleeding all night. All this time, suppressing her cries so her mother, sleeping next door, wouldn’t hear.

“The pain was more than labour pain. Imagine having such pain and you cannot scream or cry openly and you have to do it while hiding,” she explains with her eyes already tearing up.

To mask everything, the following day, despite spending a sleepless night and still deep in pain, she went to church to attend a youth conference. Something Joan terms “shameful” happened.

“While seated at the corner of the church, the blood leaked through her clothes, to the seat and to the floor. It was a shameful site and whenever I remember about that day, I feel like dying.”

Even though many, and especially her fellow girls understood her situation, deep down her heart, she was battling invisible monsters.
“I managed to get home but with my head down.”

She then went ahead to bleed for almost two weeks, all this while, trying her best to hide the bleeding from her mother.

“As I went through this, my only prayer is that my actions do not cause severe damage or make me bleed to death.”

Having grown in the slum area, Joan has seen a number of girls dying from excessive bleeding as a result of unsafe abortion. And there she was, struggling in silence as she battled heavy bleeding, not knowing whether she survived, or joined the list of girls and women who died from unsafe abortion.

> **POVERTY IS WHAT DRIVES MOST OF THE GIRLS TO GET THESE SERVICES FROM QUACK DOCTORS BECAUSE THEY ARE CHEAP. BUT IF I COULD AFFORD IT, I WOULD HAVE GONE FOR THE SERVICES OF A PROFESSIONAL DOCTOR.**

And despite all the traumas, counselling is not an option for her, due to the fears of being re-stigmatized.

“I just pray for myself and hope that I’ll overcome the trauma and fears.” Joan’s words echo the silent pain of many young women in Kenya who, like her, carry invisible wounds without ever receiving the help they need. Her story shows that healing after sexual violence and unsafe abortion is not only physical but deeply emotional.

Yet, counseling and psychosocial support remain out of reach for many survivors; either because of cost, unavailability, or the fear of stigma. Without these safe spaces, trauma lingers, growing into scars that shape their futures in silence.

This is why psychosocial support must be prioritized as a core part of sexual and reproductive health services. Every survivor deserves dignity, compassion, and the chance to heal.

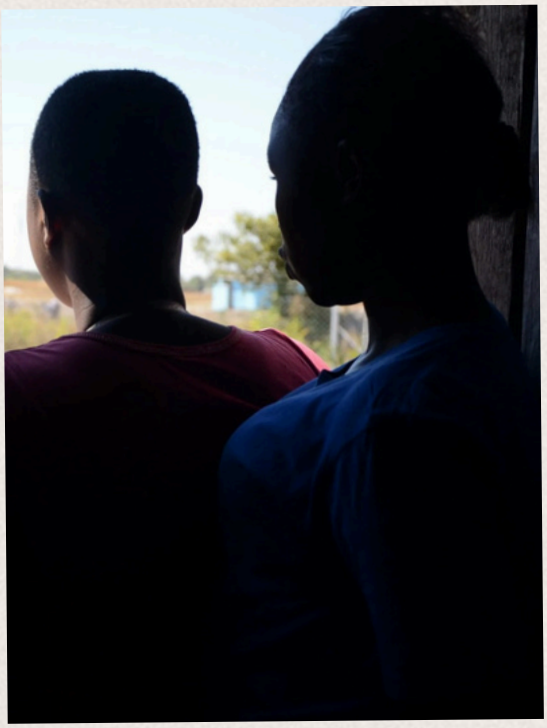
STORY 16

WHISPERS FROM THE WOMB

MERCY, 25

In Mukuru kwa Njenga, one of Nairobi's sprawling informal settlements, iron sheets rattle with the wind, and secrets cling to walls like soot from an old sufuria. Here, 25-year-old Mercy lives alongside her husband and their now two-year old child. She has known the love and pain of motherhood; and something else she talks about only in secrecy: abortion.

Not once, but twice has Mercy procured abortion. The first time nearly killed her. The second, she says, saved her from depression and the realities of bringing up two children, one of them unplanned.



It was early 2024. Mercy was still recovering from childbirth, taking care of her four-month-old baby girl when she started feeling unwell. At first, she brushed it off. Like many new mothers, she assumed it was fatigue, or just the postpartum stress of caring for a newborn. But something didn't sit right.

"I had this strange feeling. I just knew something wasn't normal," she remembers.

She took a pregnancy test at home. Positive. Disbelieving, she went to a hospital. Same result.

"I was shocked. I thought it was impossible to get pregnant while breastfeeding. That's what everyone said afterall,"

She hadn't been using protection with her partner, trusting the myths she had heard. . Now, she was pregnant again;and not in any way ready for another child, whether emotionally, physically or financially.

With that realization, Mercy knew what she wanted.
"I didn't struggle with the decision. I knew I couldn't carry that pregnancy. I just didn't know how to end it safely."

Most of the options she knew were risky; backstreet clinics, pills sold in chemists, or herbal medicine, all of which felt like traps threatening her future. She felt trapped, again.
But then, a friend gave her a lifeline: introducing her to a contact who knew a facility that offered safe and professional abortion services.

At the clinic, the doctor did a scan. She was just under two months old. It was still early enough for a safe medical abortion. "They gave me a pill. That's it. I waited, and within the hour, it was done. They gave me painkillers and antibiotics and told me what to expect."

It wasn't painful, nor traumatic, but simple and free from judgmental sneers.

But that's not how her first abortion went.
Back in 2021, just few months after leaving high school, an innocent Mercy decided to get intimate with her then boyfriend "It was my first time having sex, and that's when I got pregnant. It's like pregnancy was sitting around the corner waiting for me," she says with a half-smile."
Her mother, a devout pastor, couldn't know.

> **BEING A CHURCH LEADER, I KNEW BETTER THAN TO SHAME MY MOTHER WITH A PREGNANCY AT THAT YOUNG AGE.**

She confided in a friend, who took her to a woman in a nearby village. Not a clinic or nurse, just a house.

“She gave me a cup of Jik bleach and told me to drink it.” Nothing happened.

They went back. This time, it was Jik mixed with soda. Still nothing happened.

The third visit? A cup of bitter herbs that Mercy had to force down her throat. Within minutes, pain tore through her. Bleeding started. She screamed.

The woman panicked.

“She kicked us out. She told my friend and I that she didn’t want any trouble.”

Mercy’s friend, terrified, called her mother. That’s how she ended up in hospital, barely conscious. The health workers didn’t hide their disgust. “They scolded me. They even threatened to call the police. They treated me like trash.”

She however survived and lived to tell the story.

In Kenya, stories like Mercy’s first experience are increasingly common. Unsafe abortions remain a major concern, not because women don’t know what they want—it’s because safe choices aren’t always within reach.

It's estimated that 2,600 women die annually from complications related to unsafe abortions, amounting to seven deaths every day in Kenya."
Sometimes it's the cost, societal shame, or just fear.

"We don't talk about these things," Mercy says. "Not in church. Not in school. Not even among mothers."

That silence is deadly.

Today, Mercy, even though in secrecy, she tells girls about their sexual rights and especially their right to safe abortion.

Because she knows what it feels like to almost die in someone's house due to unsafe abortion, and she knows what it means to have access to real healthcare services.

"Both times, I made the same decision. But only one time was I treated like a human being."

She wants young women to know the truth: that there are available safe options. That no one should drink bleach nor bleed to death alone.
"I survived both sides," she says. "I don't want anyone else to have to."

STORY 17

MY HEART WAS FULL, MY HANDS WERE TIRED

MWIKALI, 21

People say life changes in a single moment, but they never tell you that sometimes, the moment comes quietly.

At the age of 20, I was just a waitress at a bar, moving from table to table, serving strangers who came for laughter, music, and escape.

That's when I met him. A man who made me think, "true love can actually be found anywhere."

He had the kind of words that could melt the sun, promises of marriage, a future, and a life where I wouldn't have to struggle alone.

I believed him. We started as friends. Friendship turned into late-night conversations, and soon into love or what I thought was love.

A few months into it, my period missed. When I found out I was pregnant, I was nervous but hopeful.

I imagined telling him, and him holding my hand, saying, "We'll figure it out."

Instead, he told me he wasn't ready for a child. The next day, he stopped coming to the bar.

Weeks later, I heard he was drinking somewhere else. I mean, he had not only run away from me, but went to the extent of changing his drinking spot so as to drive his point home.

I was left holding more than just a broken heart. I was carrying a life I wasn't sure I wanted to keep .

I tried to push through, working with my growing belly, telling myself I will manage like I had with my two kids before.

But by six months, the fear became heavier than the pregnancy itself.

I visited a "doctor" who gave me pills that I was to self-administer. He warned me it would be painful.

> THAT NIGHT AT 8 P.M., THE CRAMPS HIT LIKE WAVES OF FIRE. I SAT ON A BUCKET, SHAKING, AS BLOOD POURED OUT. IT WAS MESSY. IT WAS TERRIFYING. AND YET, IT WASN'T OVER.

For a few weeks, I kept bleeding, my body began to betray me, turning green, shutting down, and no one seemed to notice. I could barely move.

My son, just eight years old at the time, was the only one helping me at the moment. I had locked myself inside, hiding from the world.

But when the pain became unbearable, I called a friend who took me to the hospital where I received treatment, but also judgment.

The moment they learned I had terminated the pregnancy, their faces changed.

The coldness in their voices stung deep in my heart. I was young, bleeding, weak, and alone.

But society has a way of making sure you never forget the choices we made during our desperation time. Even now, if I argue with someone, they will spit it back at me like a curse.

But I have grown a thick skin.

I'm a single mother of two, and my daughter will grow up knowing the truth, not because I'm proud of it, but because she needs to learn.

I chose the unsafe route because it was cheap, but the real cost was in my body, my mind, and my son's innocence.

Even though I survived, I carry the shame on my shoulders. My survival story has become a pain and stigma.

If only there was a better way to do things, I would choose safer abortion, rather than unsafe option.

I SURVIVED THE PROCEDURE, NOT THE PAIN

MAUREEN, 32

At 32, should healing still feel this raw?

Her name is Maureen. A woman of strength, resilience, and scars that no one can see.

She lives in Mukuru kwa Njenga, a crowded slum on the edge of the city. Here, the houses are not really houses. They are more like boxes; some made of iron sheets, others of mud and wood; stacked side by side, so close that if your neighbor coughed, you'd hear it as though they were in your room.

But behind her calm eyes is a storm that began more than a decade ago when she was just 19 years-old.

"Back then, I had just finished high school. Bright eyes, full of dreams, navigating life through football matches and laughter shared with a group of boys I trusted. One of them, Desmond, felt like a brother. He'd invite me over to his place. We'd hang out, play PlayStation like homies, talk about everything. It felt innocent and safe."

But one rainy day, that safety shattered.

She still remembers that night like it was yesterday.

"He started touching me and I brushed it off. Then he kissed me. I froze. The next thing I knew; I was in his bed. It was not my will. It was not my wish. It was not by consent."
That night, the friend she trusted raped her, taking advantage of their closeness.

Afterwards, she remembers leaving his house wrapped in silence and shame, convinced she was to blame.

"After all, hadn't I gone there by myself?"

She kept the secret, hiding the confusion. But then came the missed periods, the fatigue, the morning sickness..
She was three months in before reality knocked. When she finally told one of her friends, the friend joked about a baby shower.
But for her, it wasn't a laughing matter. She felt like she was drowning.

"I went looking for Desmond. He spat me out like trash. "Toa ufala hapa, kwani mimi ndio nilikupeleka kwa nyumba?" His words stung more than the act itself.
She was sure. She wasn't ready for a baby. To make it worse, a baby conceived not from love. But from an animalistic act. With the help of a friend, the decision was made. The pregnancy had to be terminated.

With just Sh1,500 and a trembling heart, Maureen followed her friend across town to a dingy place in Kayole, to a man whose hands had touched too many lives and ended too many beginnings.

No gloves. No hospital bed. Just a dirty mattress, stained walls, and broken trust. If the walls were able to share what they'd seen, their stories would unravel like a gripping film.
The "doctor" handed her a strange liquid and told her to drink.

But it didn't work, and I had to return. Of course, he demanded more money for another method; money I didn't have. For a moment, I thought maybe I'd have to rob a bank to raise the funds.

"But I found my way out by calling parents and friends on the pretense that I had an emergency. But I wasn't lying, the termination was indeed an emergency."

Having raised the required funds, it was time to go back to the facility. Only that, this time, the "doctor" was determined to finish what he had started. Even if it meant bringing onboard "war equipment." And truly, this time, the doctor opted to use crude methods.
"He brought out sharp metal tools that look like wires that are used on the windows and inserted them inside my vagina and started pulling out the foetus in pieces. Whatever I felt as I laid on that squeaky bed still haunts me to-date. I still tremble and get weak whenever I think of it. The pain is still deep."

The "operation" went on for like two hours before the doctor declared that he was done. But that was just the beginning of Maureen's troubles.
"I bled. For hours. Then days. Then weeks. I bled in pain, in silence, in fear. After all that, he just left me with a kanzu and a warning: 'If anything happens, you're in this alone."
"And indeed, I was. Alone, bruised, in pain and violated."

After weeks of bleeding, and the situation seemed not to be getting any better, Maureen finally gathered the courage to inform her dad. But not the entire truth.

He came to school to check up on her and took her to the hospital.

"While there, I quietly pleaded with the doctor to keep everything confidential and not reveal the real reason behind my bleeding to my dad. I asked him to come up with another story instead, but still give me the treatment I needed and he did just that. I'll forever be grateful to him for protecting my secret and helping me in such a vulnerable moment."

Maureen explains that people think abortion is a choice that one makes. But for her, it felt like a punishment for trusting the wrong people, for not knowing better, for being young.

Years have passed. She has sat in counselling rooms, held back tears, and listened to stories that mirrored her own pain. At times, she wishes that she knew the existence of safe abortion. Or knew better about reproductive health. Maybe, that would have given her a head-start on where to search for help. A place she would have terminated the unwanted pregnancy without discrimination or being judged.

Even though she has learnt to speak, to share, to survive, but not fully healed. She's no longer broken.

She carries her truth like a testimony now. Not for pity. But for power.

> “I WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW HOW DANGEROUS UNSAFE ABORTION IS. WHEN YOU UNDERGO UNSAFE ABORTION, IT'S LIKE YOU'RE HALF DEAD-HALF ALIVE. YOU NEVER HEAL FROM IT, YOU JUST LEARN TO CO-EXIST WITH IT”

“I was once a victim, but I am now a survivor. Today, I tell my story so that no other girl has to tell hers this way.”

STORY 19

MY ABORTION STORY TURNED ME TO A SRHR ADVOCATE

SHARON, 24

I was 18 years old and fresh from high school. When you finish high school, you feel like you're on top of the world. You want to try everything you've heard others whisper about. For me, that included sex.

Back in school, it was an open secret, or maybe open discussion where girls openly talked about their boyfriends and "their firsts".

Back in school, it was an open secret, or maybe open discussion where girls openly talked about their boyfriends and "their firsts".

But there I was, I didn't even have a boyfriend. I kept myself away from such things because I didn't want to disappoint my parents.

But then after school, I decided enough of being a bystander and it was time for me to experience what other girls had been talking about.

And that's when I met a man whom I believed was the love of my life. That was the case until the day I decided to end my virginity.

I was so clueless about contraceptives or condoms and so we didn't bother using any.

"Those few seconds of pleasure turned into a nightmare."

In a few weeks' time, I started experiencing all signs related to pregnancy.
But shock on me! He was not ready to be a father. And me, at the age of 18, I wasn't ready for motherhood.

My options? Only one crossed my mind: Abortion. And probably the unsafe one.

My parents, especially my mother, was one hell of a disciplinarian and I was not about to burst her bubble.

Also, my level of desperation was driven by the cultural belief that weighed heavily on me. In our community, it was said that if a firstborn girl got pregnant early, it would "jinx" her younger sisters to do the same. Also, I had just finished high school, so practically, I knew that keeping the pregnancy would shatter my dreams of joining college.

My friend, though young, always had answers for everything. When I told her about the pregnancy, she told me that she had a "doctor" who dealt with unwanted pregnancies.

And when we visited that, he only asked for Sh2500, money that was hard to get by. But I did all I could to get it.
And finally when I laid down on that makeshift bed, my life changed.

The excruciating pain that penetrated through my veins, and every part of my body was unimaginable.
He used something that looked like crocheting pins that he inserted in my vagina and started pulling parts of the fetus. It was painful. I screamed. I cried. I felt every nerve in my body tear. But it had to be done. That's what I told myself. Talk of desperation moments.

After that, I couldn't walk home immediately. I laid on that same bed trying to recover from the pain. My only prayer; to survive the ordeal. And for sure, I survived.

It's that experience that made me become a sexual and reproductive health rights champion in Mukuru-an informal settlement- where cases of unsafe abortion are prevalent.

Before starting the advocacy work, sights of aborted fetuses on garbage pile-ups were very common. One could count nothing less than five fetuses, every day.

Worse was, due to stigma and harsh judgment from the society, after procuring abortion from unprofessional doctors and their condition got worse, they would hide in their homes, avoiding hospital even when they knew it was the only way to save their lives. Because they know about the sneers, whispers, stigma and rejection that they will face if they were to come out in the open.

And so I decided to engage the girls, educate them on using condoms and contraceptives, and give them safer options when family planning fails.

As a champion, my work is to listen to the girls and guide them through their choices. I don't influence their choices; I don't question neither do I judge. My only question is always, are you sure you want to do this? Then, I guide them on where they could have the pregnancy terminated.

When I started my advocacy work, many people called me a "murderer" in the open, but came secretly to ask for advice on safe options their girlfriends or wives could terminate the pregnancy. Everyone who seeks abortion has their own reason and its not in my place to judge them, and so I usually direct them to the right places.

And the changes in Mukuru can be noted. No more fetuses lying on the sides of the road. And the men, and women too, openly discuss SRHR issues.

The majority of them, instead of sending their girls into unsafe hands of quack doctors, they are now making better choices.

And that's the only way to end deaths from unsafe abortion. Empowering girls and women, and even men with the right information about reproductive health rights will help them make better discourses.

> **WE SHOULD NOT BURY OUR HEADS INSIDE THE SAND AND THINK IT'S NOT HAPPENING. THE REALITY IS THAT MANY GIRLS AND WOMEN IN SLUM AREAS ARE LOSING THEIR LIVES IN THE HANDS OF UNPROFESSIONAL PEOPLE, AND IT'S TIME THAT WE STOP THE MENACE.**

LET'S CONNECT

RAISEYOURVOICECBO@GMAIL.COM

INFO@RAISEYOURVOICECBO.ORG

RAISE YOUR VOICE

@RAISEYOURV OICE

@RAISEYOURVOICECBOKENYA

RAISEYOURVOICECBO

RAISEYOUR VOICE CBO

RAISEYOURVOICECBO.BSKY.SOCIAL

RAISE YOUR VOICE

EMPOWERED. ACTIVATED. ENGAGED

WITH SUPPORT FROM GLOBAL FUND FOR WOMEN