

GBV and the Heavy Burden Faced by Women

By Protected FAJs

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A woman from a church mocked, insulted, and abandoned

Lerato was a choir member at a church in Hammanskraal. She was active, well-known, and admired for her beautiful voice. During a big church conference, she sang as usual and helped welcome visitors. When the church took a break, a man named Jonas, who had a crush on her, approached her. They flirted and talked about their feelings. Later, they agreed to meet behind the classrooms of the school where the event was held.

When the time came, Lerato and Jonas went behind the building, kissed, touched, and eventually had sex. They did not know someone was sitting in a car nearby, secretly recording everything. The person shared the video with a friend, and it went viral. Soon, the church elders saw it, and the whole community heard about it.

What hurt most was that all the blame fell on Lerato. People insulted her, mocked her, and judged her harshly for doing such a thing in church clothes. Jonas's name was hardly mentioned. Lerato faced humiliation and shame, and the bullying grew worse each day because her face was everywhere. She broke down emotionally, ended up in hospital, and sadly passed away.

The church failed her. They judged only her and protected Jonas. He did not defend her, and his reputation stayed clean. People must stop judging only women in situations where both parties were involved. Lerato is gone, carrying a stigma she did not deserve. The silence of the church shows how discrimination remains strong in many religious spaces.

Growing up with abuse and the lifelong wounds it caused

My own life was also marked by GBV. Growing up, I watched my mother suffer physical and emotional abuse from her boyfriend. She struggled to find work and raise my younger brother and me as a single parent. She had her own battles, yet somehow still tried to take care of us.

When my brother and I returned from visiting family in December 2015, we found a man named Patrick living in the house. He was supposed to be mama's "friend", but he stayed permanently. He took us from our small, loving home to a big house full of things, but none of us were happy again. Patrick abused my mother, my brother, and me. He hurt them physically, and he hurt me emotionally.

As a child, I did not know abuse. I thought being beaten and having bruises was normal. When I grew older, I met my husband, who also abused me. I accepted it because I believed violence was part of life. He beat me daily and later infected me with HIV. I fell into deep pain and became addicted to drugs. I felt unloved, ashamed, and lost. I believed my children did not need me because I was not a good mother.

Eventually, I sought help for my addiction. I learned to accept my HIV status, even when people judged me. I realised my past did not make me weak, it made me strong. My experiences have helped me become a better mother and a stronger woman. I now know there is power in survival, and I believe I was given this journey so I can help others going through abuse, addiction, or living with HIV.

Today, I speak proudly because my story can uplift someone who feels broken. No woman deserves judgment or shame. We must lift each other up because we are all one, and healing begins when someone shows kindness instead of cruelty.

This article is an opinion piece submitted on 13 November 2025. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of Karibu! Online or Khanya College. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.