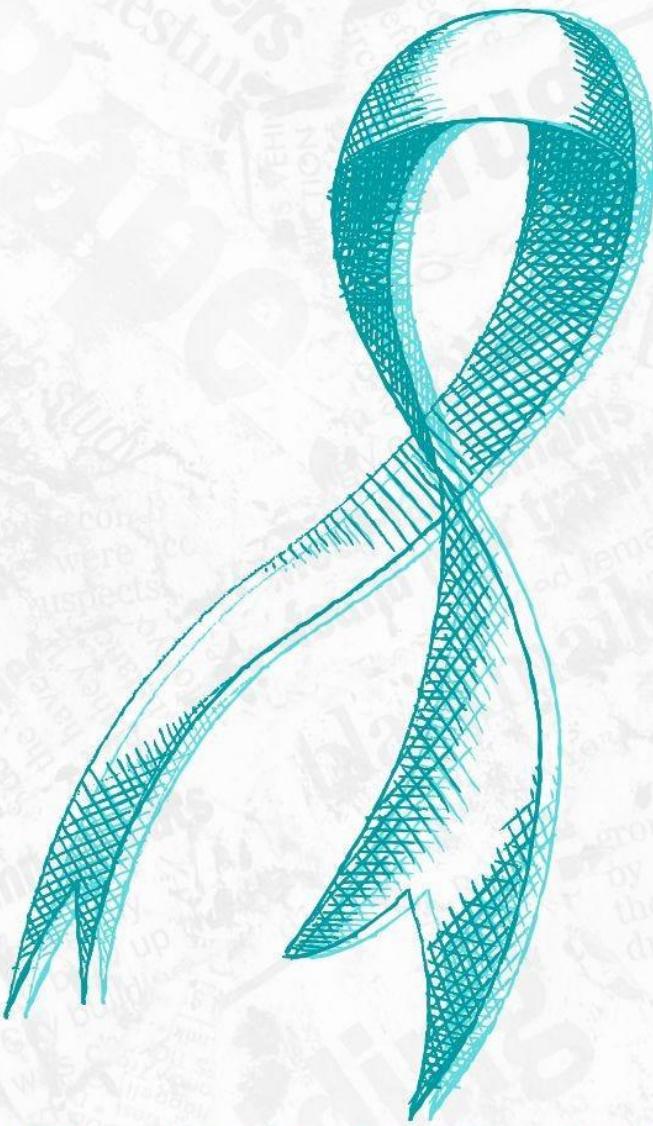


APRIL ENDS TODAY: BUT FOR TOO MANY, THE TRAUMA IS YEAR-ROUND

Every month has its face. Its own happiness and sadness that it brings. To one person, this month was the best, to another, it was the worst.

What about the survivor? What about the woman whose body was violated?

Beneath its ordinary pace, this specific month, April, has held a truth we rarely give full breath to: Sexual Assault Awareness.



**APRIL
IS SEXUAL
ASSAULT
AWARENESS MONTH**

It felt like a whisper in a country where silence is likened to survival. It actually might just be survival. From the man saying “Be quiet and it will be over soon.”, to the women saying “Do you want the whole community to know what happened to you?”

“It’s better to forget. Talking about it will only make it worse.”

“He’s a good man. Don’t destroy his life over one mistake.”

“You must have done something to provoke him. Men don’t just do that.”

We are taught to make ourselves small to avoid waking the violence that men have refused to put down. We teach girls to walk in groups, to carry keys between their fingers, to watch their drinks. As ladies, we don’t think before second guessing our clothes. It comes naturally to us.

“Share your location just in case.” Words from a friend to her lady friend when the taxi comes.

“Let me pretend he’s my boyfriend so the others leave me alone.” Almost like women cannot be safe from men unless they are with another man.

Are women not human beings deserving of the same respect?

This month, we not only remember the victims of sexual assault, but the unsung heroines who have refused to stay silent despite the resistance they face. One Njeri wa Migwi, the founder of Usikimye, is one of them.

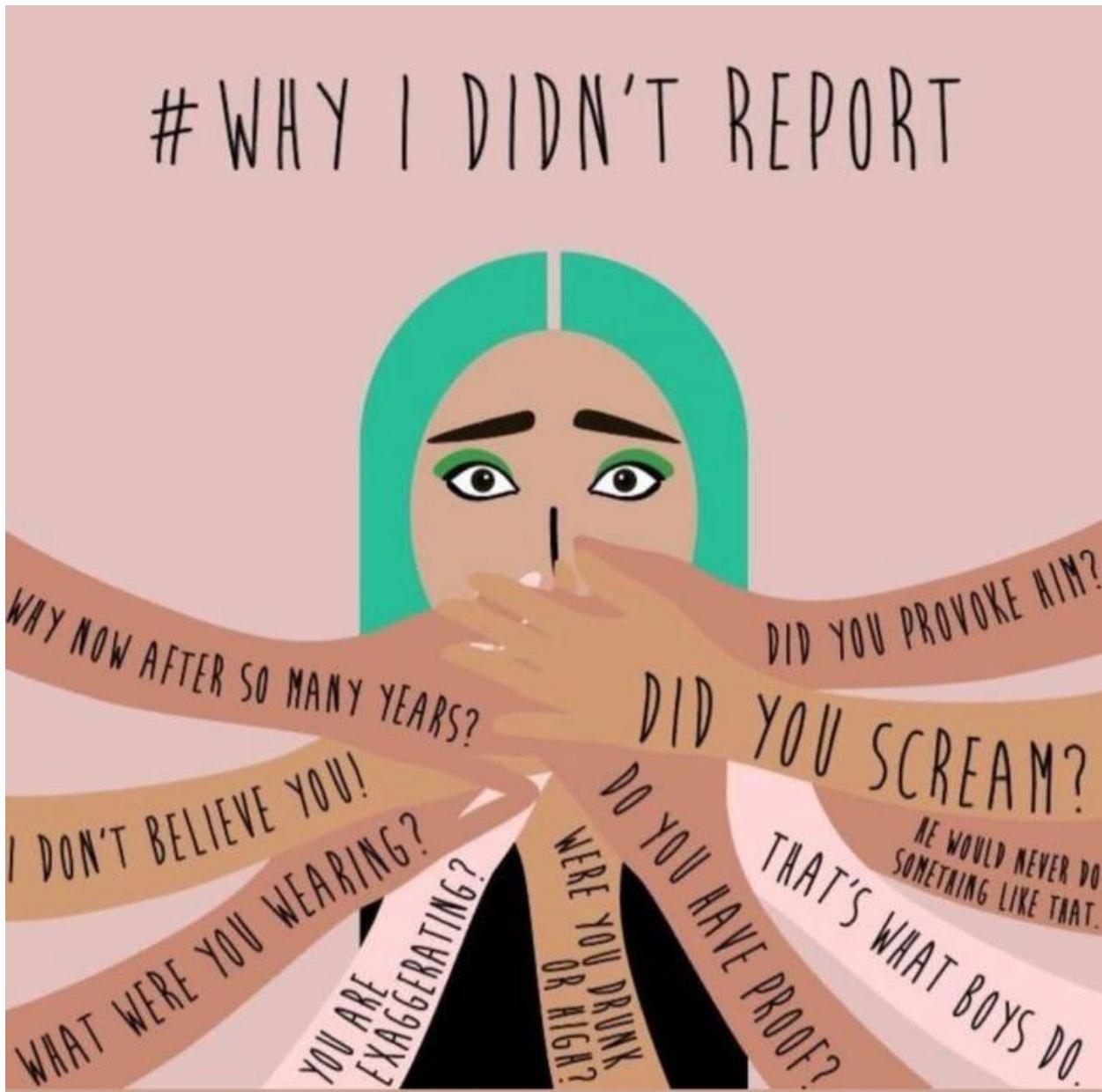


Usikimye quite literally means ‘Don’t be quiet.’

As a mother, don’t be quiet when your daughter tells you her father is creeping into her room at night. As a sister, don’t be quiet when your sister tells you her brother is brushing his hands past her developing breasts. As an aunt, don’t hush your niece when she confesses her uncle kissed her mouth and told her not to say anything. As a teacher, don’t dismiss the girl who flinches when a male teacher passes too close. As a friend, don’t ask “what were you wearing?” when

your best friend tells you she was raped.

Silence is the accomplice of violence. And every time we choose to protect the family name, the church elder, the promising son or the powerful boss, we sentence another girl to the same horror.



Njeri wa Migwi, through her grassroots movements, has created safehouses, food banks and rapid response teams for survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence. Where the country fails, she steps in. Where the law stalls, she pushes. She reminds us that GBV is not just physical. It is systemic. It is in the police officer who won't take your statement. The village chief who tells you to sort your domestic issue privately. The magistrate who maliciously delays your hearing.

The doctor who won't fill a P3 form. The neighbor who tells the crowd, "They fight every day. It's normal,"

Kenya is not without laws. The Sexual Offences Act, 2006 provides a comprehensive framework for defining, prosecuting and punishing sexual offences. The Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, 2015 expands the understanding of harm beyond bruises to include emotional and psychological abuse.

The Children Act, the Employment Act and the Penal Code all touch on aspects of sexual violence. And yet, the National Crime Research Centre reports that the majority of sexual offences go unreported, and of those reported, only a fraction reach conviction. Justice is still a privilege. Survivors are retraumatized by the very systems meant to protect them.

Because stigma walks faster than the truth.

Awareness is not a luxury. It is a lifeline. We need to stop speaking of sexual violence like an inevitable thing. It is not something that happens to others far from us. It is not something to just talk about and leave it at that. It is not an accident.

It is a decision.

The decision of the man who forces himself on a woman not because he lacks understanding, but because the understanding he has, is that he is entitled to her body. The decision of the friend who laughs of rape as "just being a man". The decision of a woman who asks "but what was she doing there?". The decision of the pastors and the leaders who blame it on indecency and immorality. The decision of a society that teaches boys that conquest is manhood and teaches girls that their safety is their responsibility. But how safe is that 4 day old from her father?

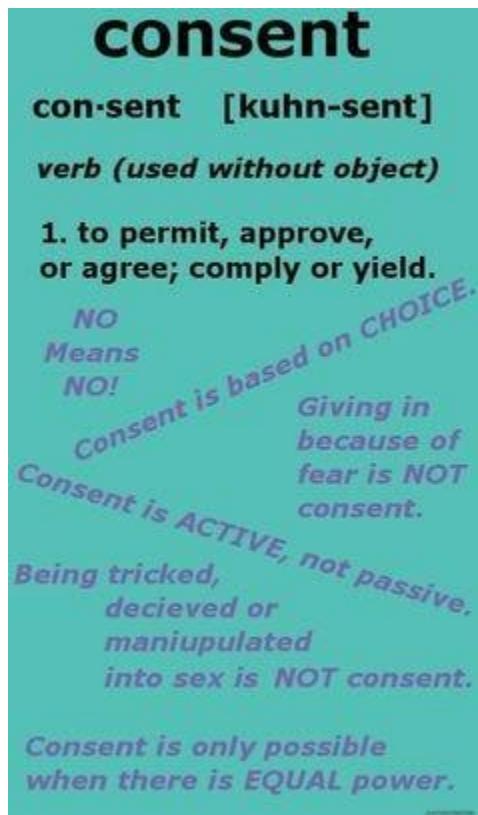


Men are not taught empathy and neither do they take it upon themselves to learn. They are praised for domination. We say to our daughters, "Don't walk there," but never to our sons not to rape. We silence victims to keep families intact, churches unscandalized, careers untouched, reputations protected. Who will keep that girl intact? Who will protect her?

Everytime we choose image over truth, we make a decision too. And that decision is not neutral. It is violent.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is not just a box to tick. It is a call. For the thousands of women whose names we do not know, we must answer with more than hashtags. We must fund shelters. We must reform the Evidence Act to allow for trauma-informed procedures. We must include comprehensive consent education in schools, not as a footnote in biology class,

but as a cultural foundation. Before the man who says he likes you and sits next to you in class, raises his hand in a Criminal Law lecture to say “Consent cannot be withdrawn.”



If awareness is the goal, then who exactly is it serving, when girls are taught to constantly avoid harm, yet many boys are never meaningfully taught about consent, boundaries and respect? If we do not instill respect for bodily autonomy from the earliest stages of socialization; at home, in schools, in churches, then awareness month risks becoming ceremonial.

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