



Confronting the Scourge of Violence and Rape

Many South African communities have come to accept violence as a part of their reality. More than 95 percent of rural abuse and rape cases aren't even reported. When they are, forensic evidence must be collected using rape kits that police often neglect to provide to doctors. And if evidence is collected, it may be sent to the country's only forensic laboratory — which may take a year to return results.

But after ten-year-old Konani Malaba was raped by a neighbor, police brought her to the only safe haven in Thohoyandou that empowers and treats victims of rape and violence: the USAID-supported Family Violence and Sexual Abuse Trauma Center.

At the center, housed at Tshilidzini Hospital outside of Thohoyandou, patients like Konani are examined, counseled and tested for HIV/AIDS. Each case is handled by a social worker and a part-time psychologist, who work with the police to file a report for every case. The social workers also help guide Konani and other survivors through the trial process in Thohoyandou's sexual offenses court — a system that can be rife with corruption and untrained intermediaries. One of the center's 14 full-time monitors is assigned to each case, meeting with police, prosecutors and the court to advocate for the victim.



Photo: USAID

Rape survivors congregate with a feeling of safety at the Family Violence and Sexual Abuse Trauma Center.

Privacy is paramount at the center. Victims are allowed to stay for several days if their safety at home is in question, and meals, a bath and clothes are provided. Before leaving the center each victim is assessed for long- and short-term counseling needs. She is given a bus ticket to attend a weekly survivor meeting and a care package with food and vitamins to bolster her immune system. Medicines, including antiretrovirals, are also provided based on need; about half the center's victims test positive for HIV/AIDS.

The center has been an extremely effective advocate on behalf of the victims, exposing cases previously ignored by the justice system.

Victim support is only a part of the battle against domestic violence and rape. Empowerment and education are stressed as well. And amidst a great many challenges, small victories are slowly resulting from the center's initiatives. Through a contest involving 100 community song writers and performers, the center selected a theme song that embodies the hope that awareness will heal victims and help prevent violence.

The center has been an extremely effective advocate on behalf of the victims, exposing cases previously ignored by the justice system. While the national average for convictions in sexual offenses courts is five percent, because of the center's tireless monitoring, two-thirds of cases in Thohoyandou's sexual offenses court result in convictions.

Recently awarded the municipality's highest honor for social services provision, the center will open a shelter for victims of rape and violence this year, continuing its mission to be a champion for those who need one most.

Success Story

