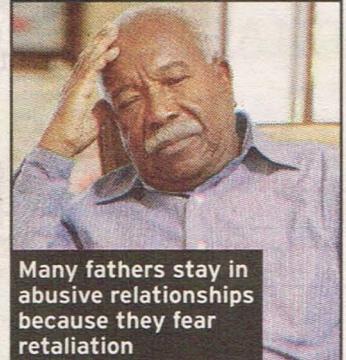


MY MOTHER IS VIOLENT, HITS MY FATHER

66

At home, we leave with a terrorist for a mother. She has a terrible temper and beats us until she sees blood. I have seen her beat my father until he cries. It is so traumatising, especially for my little sister. I do not know how to help him. I keep wondering why he does not leave her and take us away. It makes me so angry to see him endure the beatings. Sometimes, she is nice, but when she drinks, she uses anything to beat us. **Niyo**



Many fathers stay in abusive relationships because they fear retaliation

EXPERT OPINION

Urge him to speak to a trusted person, domestic violence support organisation

Dear Niyo,

What you are talking about is not a private family matter, a misunderstanding or a momentary loss of temper. It is violence. Domestic violence often survives because it is hidden behind silence, shame and confusion, and when it occurs within a family, that silence becomes even heavier.

When a parent becomes a source of fear instead of safety, a child's inner world is profoundly altered. Parents are meant to be a child's first experience of protection and emotional security. When that role is replaced by rage, beatings and bloodshed, the home becomes a place of constant alertness. Alcohol intensifies this danger.

While alcohol does not cause violence on its own, it lowers inhibitions, amplifies aggression and diminishes empathy, making violent behaviour more severe and unpredictable. Children in such homes are forced to anticipate danger rather than trust peace and this state of constant vigilance is deeply traumatising.

From a mental health and psychological perspective, it is possible that your mother is living with a serious psychological disorder, but this must be stated carefully. No diagnosis can be made without professional assessment, and mental illness must never be used to excuse

abuse. That said, patterns such as extreme rage, loss of impulse control, repeated violent outbursts and alcohol-fuelled aggression may be associated with conditions such as substance use disorder, severe trauma-related disorders, or certain personality disorders that affect emotional regulation and empathy. These conditions can increase the risk of violence, but they do not remove personal responsibility. Violence remains a choice and accountability is essential for it to stop.

Abusive behaviour often follows a repeating cycle. Tension gradually builds, followed by an explosive episode of violence. Afterward, there may be periods of calm, regret or apparent kindness that create hope that change has occurred. This calm phase can be deeply confusing for children, as it coexists with memories of terror. These "good moments" do not cancel out the violence; they are part of the cycle that keeps victims emotionally trapped and uncertain.

When the victim of violence is a father, the silence surrounding abuse can become even more profound. Society often fails to recognise men as victims of domestic violence, leaving them isolated and ashamed. Many fathers stay because they fear retaliation, worry about losing their children, lack financial independence or believe that enduring abuse may protect the family.

At this point, the most

important intervention is not trying to fix or diagnose the violent parent, but protecting those who are being harmed. For you, Niyo, the most effective actions right now involve seeking support outside the home. This may include confiding in a trusted adult such as a relative, teacher, school counsellor, religious leader or community elder.

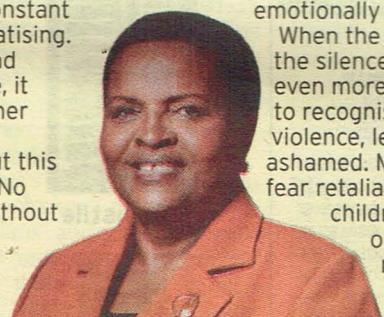
External awareness reduces isolation and increases protection. If it is safe to do so, privately documenting incidents, such as dates, injuries, or patterns of behaviour can also help adults or professionals intervene more effectively.

To support your father, the most powerful help you can offer is validation and connection to resources. Let him know that what he is experiencing is abuse, that he is not weak, and that help exists and can be life-changing. Encouraging him to speak with a trusted person, counsellor or domestic violence support organisation may help him see options he cannot see on his own.

For you and your siblings, emotional support is essential. Trauma-informed counselling, school-based mental health services or child advocacy organisations can help you process fear, anger and confusion in safe and supportive ways.

CLEMENCE BYOMUHANGI,

MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGIST



Talk to your mother when she is sober

Dear Niyo,

Abusers usually find it hard to change their ways because they do not realise the magnitude of their actions. Some behaviours are triggered by underlying mental health issues and based on your mother's actions, she may not be an exception.

Your experience sounds deeply painful and it would be helpful to have support from other family members. Safety planning in response to a violent parent can involve coping with emotions, informing trusted

relatives about the abuse, seeking legal action or pursuing counselling.

If possible, sit down with your father and your siblings away from mother and come up with a plan on how you can all stay safe.

For peace and harmony to prevail, it may help to approach your mother during her sober moments. I suggest personal counselling, but she must agree to it and be open to making changes herself.

Robert Mugenyi,
Contributor

Advise your father to find another home

Dear Niyo,

Abuse affects children greatly. Have a chat with your father about leaving. Physical abuse can become fatal and you might lose

both parents. Your father might be afraid of leaving you. Tell him he can find another home and you join him there. Sorry.

Israel, Reader

NEXT WEEK

Dear Counsellor,

Should I be concerned that my baby prefers the babysitter over me? I am a working woman and spend a lot of time in the office. Most times I come home at 8:00pm. My baby will only come to me when her sitter is not anywhere in sight. As long as she is at home, the baby refuses that I hold her.

My husband and I decided to let her share a room with the babysitter from the time she was eight months old. The baby is now two years old. Even trying to re-introduce her into our bedroom has proved a challenge as the baby cries until we return her to the babysitter. I have thought about replacing the babysitter, but she really loves the child and has bonded with her. How can I make this right?

Christianna Mugabi

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