

## Client's Story: *I Didn't Hear the Red Alarm Bells...*

Sam and I were colleagues at a computer technology company. He was witty, good-looking and a talker. I liked his outspokenness and that he was comfortable in his own skin. We chatted sometimes over coffee. Then, one day, he approached me and said, "You have the most beautiful eyes. I love how they sparkle when we chat." He asked me out for a date, and at that moment, I was the happiest person in the world. We discovered that we had a lot in common. We dated for one year. During that time, everything appeared rosy and full of hope to me. Sam showed in so many ways that he cared about me.

Now, thinking back, there were warning signs that things could turn sour. Sam rarely paid for anything when we went out. He told me that he gave a lot of his salary to his parents for their needs; and that he was also helping out a cousin who was out of work and had a family to support. I understood. I didn't mind. I trusted Sam wholeheartedly.

Everything was good in the first year of marriage. Then problems began to emerge. Sam would often take money RM50, RM100 that I left on the dressing table with a note that said, "Needed the cash. Have a good day. Love you beautiful." It did irk me, but I told myself not to be petty. I was lucky to have a husband who was kind and cared about me. Slowly, the financial responsibilities that we had initially decided to share fell on my shoulders. When I questioned Sam on why he never had any money despite earning a decent salary of RM5,000, he would reply saying that he was looking after his parents, and sometimes his sister, or cousin or brother. When I raised any objections, he accused me of being selfish, uncaring and self-centered. I felt stuck. In order to save, I stopped going out with friends, stopped allowing myself even small indulgences like a Starbucks coffee. I stopped doing things I liked because I was afraid.

Sam didn't seem to notice or care that I was unhappy. I began confiding in my friends about my difficulties. In return, Sam began accusing me of having an affair. Whenever anything irritated or upset him, or I raised anything regarding finances, he would snarl, "At least I'm not sleeping around," or "You're just a pretty little slut. I know you are cheating on me, just admit it." I would plead with him to understand that I wasn't doing anything wrong and show him the messages on my phone. Nothing seemed to convince him. I consoled myself thinking, "I have always made sound choices before this. This is just a rough patch, everything will be fine."

However, things got worse. Sam continued to take money from me without contributing anything. Every time I tried to say something a fight ensued. In September 2014, Sam told me of wanting to make some investments to "turn things around for us." He spoke about how he had been feeling terrible about the money situation and wanted to redeem himself. He promised me that the projects were secure and asked for a loan of RM50,000. He promised he would begin paying me back at the start of the new year. I naively believed him. I wanted so badly for things to change that I emptied out my savings and gave him the money. A couple of weeks later,

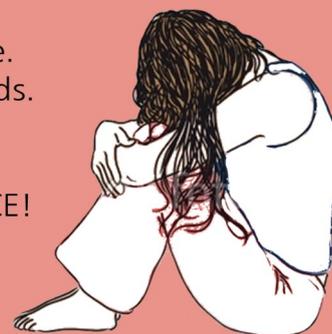
Sam said he had made an error and was short of RM10,000. He pleaded that this would be the last of it. I didn't have anything left, and so had to borrow money from my sister.

In December I asked him several times about how the projects he invested in were doing. However, each time I asked him, he came up with excuses. I was too embarrassed to tell my parents and sister the full extent of my problems. They had always supported me in every decision and I couldn't bring myself to burden them with my problems. All I told them was that Sam and I were having problems, but that it was nothing I couldn't manage.

I was a guarantor for my boyfriend's car loan. He crashed the car, then he dumped me. Now I owe thousands.

This is DOMESTIC VIOLENCE!

#financialabuse



My boyfriend says I'm useless with money. He tells me exactly what to buy.

This is DOMESTIC VIOLENCE!

#financialabuse

In January, I asked Sam when he would be able to start repaying my sister and I. I was absolutely shocked when Sam bluntly replied that he would not be able to repay the loans because of “bad investments.” He refused to be open and tell me what was going on. I was furious, hurt, disappointed and in a state of disbelief. I left my marital home and moved back into my parent’s house in January 2015. It was so painful to see my parents cry; hurt because of my decision. Every day for two months until I changed my number, Sam would send me horrible messages, calling me “worthless, a piece of shit who would never find anyone else.” He even sent me porn videos and insisted that I admit I had acted in them. The shame, guilt, hurt and disbelief was tearing me up, but I put up a brave front for my family and friends.

My boyfriend gets angry if he doesn't have money to go out with his mates. So I pay all the rent and the bills.

This is DOMESTIC VIOLENCE!

#financialabuse



I came to WCC for help because I could lie to everyone else, but not myself. I was not ok, and willed myself to have the courage to make an appointment. I was nervous coming for the first session. I hated being vulnerable. My social worker was kind and put me at ease. I'll never forget, five minutes into me talking, she said, “I get the sense that you are a volcano that is fighting against erupting. It is ok you don't have to be brave here.” I broke down and sobbed. It felt good to let it all out, to not pretend. Following three sessions, my social worker helped me process feelings of loss and grief. I have accepted that my marriage is over. She helped me understand that sometimes you have to let go of the rotten part of you in order to be able to live again. What was hardest for me and to some extent still is, is to let go of the guilt I feel for causing my parents such distress. It's difficult for me to forgive myself for marrying Sam. The sessions helped me see that there is no use in holding on to guilt as it prevents me from living my life meaningfully. I used to spend a lot of time trying not to feel sad, trying not to be weak, and trying to block out negative feelings; it was exhausting. The expansion and mindfulness exercises are helping me make space for painful feelings. I am slowly getting better at ‘letting them pass.’

Only my name was on the lease. He trashed the place and dumped me. Now I'm the one paying.

This is DOMESTIC VIOLENCE!

#financialabuse



I feel better, being more open with my family members about feelings and have started going out more with friends. I have even made an appointment with a lawyer to find out about divorce proceedings. I know that in the journey of healing, I have some way to go yet, but I know that I am getting there.

**Sara, 32 years old**

*“Saya mengucapkan ribuan terima kasih kerana menghulurkan bantuan kepada saya. Kalau puan tak beri huluran bantuan, saya tak tahu macam mana berdepan dengan masalah. Saya memohon doa dari tuhan beri lebih rezeki kepada puan sekali lagi saya ucapkan ribuan terima kasih.”*

**Aminah, 43 tahun, mangsa keganasan rumah tangga**