



Client's Story:

I am fighting to rebuild myself

Gie (pen name), 35 years old, survivor of domestic violence

The scars of what happened to me are etched on my body and in my memory. It still hurts to look back or talk about it, but I am fighting. I am fighting to rebuild myself and to make a life I can be proud of. I used to be a girl who couldn't even take the bus alone. Now, I own and run a beauty and bridal services parlour. I have come very far, yes, but I have lost a lot too.

Mine was a 'semi arranged' marriage. My family is a traditional one, so I got to know my husband by chatting on the phone only. Soon after being introduced to my husband, marriage was proposed and my parents accepted the proposal. However, my Dad later advised me against marrying my husband because he was "not a good person." As we were already in love, I paid those warning sirens no heed.

I was 18 years old when we got married in 1998. A week into the marriage my husband began beating me. He would get upset over the smallest of things, like lunch not being ready when he wanted it or household chores not done to his liking. I was always at fault. Whenever he was angry or upset, an argument would ensue which would lead to violence. After the first beating, he fell at my feet, wept and begged for forgiveness. We were newly married and I didn't want to make a big deal out of it so I put it down to stress. We were living with my parents but I didn't tell them because I wanted to resolve matters ourselves. When questioned about the bruises on my arms, I blamed it on my carelessness.

In 1999, I gave birth to my first child. Arguments continued to occur once or twice a week. My husband was a jealous man and frequently accused me of cheating on him. It

took very little to set my husband off and he would punch and slap me during arguments. His blows befell my whole body - arms, legs, stomach and even my face would be adorned with ugly swollen blue-black bruises. After each incident of violence, my husband would cry and beg to be forgiven. He would tell me how much he loved me and that he didn't mean to hurt me. I endured the violence because I loved him. I kept praying to God, hoping that my husband would repent and change. I felt I couldn't tell my parents because I had not heeded my Dad's advice.

In 2000, following a work dispute, my husband stopped working at my family's restaurant, and we moved out of my parent's home. Over the years, my husband tried to start many businesses but failed. Often, we were unable to pay rent and would be forced to move. Sometimes we moved as often as 5 or 6 times a year. Instead of working harder, my ex-husband turned to alcohol. In order to make ends meet I had to pawn my gold jewellery. When I refused, he would beat me.

Slapping, punching and pulling my hair was not all my husband inflicted on me. He hit me numerous times with objects - a motorbike helmet, mop and hammer. Once, he threw a knife at my foot and I had to get three stitches. However, what truly cut me deeply were his words- the dirty derogatory words that he would hurl at me. Though at times my husband was good to the children, he often screamed and threw things at them when they were "too noisy." I wanted to keep the family together. I also didn't know what else to do at the time, and didn't have friends to confide in. When things got too much, once, I tried leaving the house but, to no effect.

By 2008, I had two sons and a daughter. My husband's business efforts began to bear fruit.



He began frequenting pubs and clubs and started spending less time at home. Soon, I began hearing gossip – my husband was “going around” with another woman. I felt disgust at a man who could betray me when the “sun began to shine” after all I had gone through for him. He denied having an affair and advised me to turn a deaf ear to the rumours. I left the house with my sons and went to my Mum’s. I asked my husband many times to admit to his wrongdoings in the presence of my parents so that we could rebuild our relationship, but he refused and continued denying the affair. One day, a squabble broke out and my husband’s brother used foul language on my Mum. I was so incensed that I made my first police report about the domestic violence and the fight. When my husband found out, the hostility between us worsened.

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Even though my husband was neither a good husband nor father, at that time I could not let him go. For the two months that I was at my parents’, I was miserable. I missed my husband and daughter terribly. Seeing my unhappiness, my family suggested that I return to my husband. He did not accept me back graciously, and instead imposed cruel conditions. I foolishly accepted thinking that I could guide him back onto the “right path.”

Upon moving back, my husband blackmailed me, saying that if I wanted to see my daughter, I would have to give him all the jewellery I had. I fought with my Mum to obtain the jewellery and gave it to him. I found out later that he pawned the jewellery to be able to secretly wed the “other woman”. My husband never admitted to the second marriage or to having a child with his second wife.

The more I reflected, the angrier I got. I could finally see clearly. My husband was never

going to change. It was I who had to change my mindset and turn my life around. I made a big decision – I was going to live my life on my own terms, and not on my husband’s. I would choose not to miss him, not to care or listen to him. I gained strength by confiding in my neighbours. My husband was spending large amounts of time with his “other” family, and so was rarely home. Although infrequent, the arguments and violence continued. I focused on carving my own life.

In 2009 I filed for divorce in the Syariah court. Without his knowledge I lodged police reports detailing the incidents of violence. I became increasingly independent. I worked for my Dad while taking a course in beautification. I also started driving. My husband refused to divorce me. He promised to take care of me and gave me a car.

In 2011, one day, while using my car, a friend of mine had an accident. I told my husband about the accident and we argued. He then turned up at the house, beat me using a slipper and banged my head against a wall, all in front my children. I was in agony and had to go to the hospital. I could no longer forgive my husband. A friend of mine referred me to WCC, where she said I could get help.

WCC has been a tremendous source of motivation, support and guidance. The social worker helped me to apply for an Interim Protection Order (IPO), while my husband was being investigated for domestic violence. She also helped me obtain a Protection Order (PO) once investigations were over. My husband was charged, but acquitted due to insufficient evidence. The WCC team supported me through the court process, and despite the setback, is still supporting with me. I am currently in the process of appealing the acquittal.

Devastatingly, in 2012, my husband took my children away from me. I tried to get them back through peaceful means but was unable to. However, I am hopeful that I will. Last year, my divorce finally came through. Now, I am focused on making my two-year old business flourish, so that hopefully one day, my children shall see what I have built for them and myself.