



GUATEMALA: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FEAR

Treating survivors of sexual violence

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SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN GUATEMALA

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF FEAR

Guatemala has become one of the countries most affected by violence. In the capital Guatemala City, MSF treats the population who suffers the most and receives the least support: survivors of sexual violence.

“The biggest change is that I am scared all the time. I was scared before but now I cannot even walk alone. I am scared of people I don’t know, I am scared of men I don’t know. The feeling that they touch me gives me panic.”

Maria will never forget this day in November for the rest of her life. She just sat in a bus, five blocks away from her home when a black car blocked the road. Two masked men entered the bus and put a gun at Maria’s head. “They forced me to go with them, they blindfolded me”, she tells the psychologist of MSF some days later. “They took me to a place I didn’t know. It was seven of them. They beat me up. Then they started to rape me.”

Maria is a survivor of sexual violence. She is one of estimated 10,000 people that are raped in Guatemala every year. The Central American country has one of the worst rates of violence worldwide. The national authorities lack the resources and the will to give survivors of sexual violence access to treatment. Having set up a programme in 2007, MSF now treats 100 new patients every month both medically and psychologically. But MSF is doing more than just treating the patients. With education and information, the team in Guatemala City is showing the authorities, the medical community and the Guatemalan public that sexual violence is a medical emergency and that there is treatment possible and available.

In the last years, violence has significantly increased in Guatemala. In the beginning of 2009, there were about 20 killings every day. Most seemed to be gang related. 40 bus drivers alone had been killed within three months because their companies hadn’t paid bribes. The majority of those killings happen in the capital.

“We have a history of 30 years of civil war which has not been solved”, explains Mayra Rodas, psychological coordinator of MSF in Guatemala. The ones who suffer most from this violence are women: “We live in a machismo and patriarch society. Women are treated as objects which can just be taken. To be a woman here is like being garbage. This is what our patients tell us.”

This is exactly what the seven men did with Maria. They took her, they humiliated her, they raped her. She was released after a day of unbelievable cruelty. “They told me if I would press charges they would kill my family” she says quietly. “So I didn’t.”

The doctor in a local clinic referred Maria to the programme of MSF. “They gave me right away about 15 pills. I didn’t like them and even less the injections”, the 17-year-old recalls. “I was really

nervous if I was pregnant or HIV positive. But thanks to god and the medication they gave me the results were all negative.”

A medical emergency

Sexual violence is a medical emergency. “It is not widely known that we can actually prevent HIV/Aids even if the patient has been infected”, explains Silvia Dubòn, medical doctor with MSF. “It’s important to come within 72 hours after the attack. If we start giving anti-retroviral medication within this timeframe, we can prevent the spreading of the HI Virus.” Unwanted pregnancy can be prevented within five days after the attack and Hepatitis B within three months. Other sexual transmitted diseases like Syphilis, Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea can be treated at any time.

Treating Maria against infections was not the difficult part: the emotional trauma goes much deeper and takes more time to heal. “It just kept coming back, everything they did to me. I was thinking of it while I was eating. So I stopped eating. I was dreaming and it all came back to me, then I woke up and I couldn’t fall asleep anymore. That’s where I met with the psychologist of MSF and then it got better. She helped me a lot”, Maria remembers.

“Often I have to say that I don’t have a pill or a vaccination to make you feel better”, explains Wendy Mérida, psychologist with MSF. “It is a process of getting to know your feelings so that you can talk about it. Every person has a totally different story. We try to enable the patient to express herself.”

Learning to talk about rape is the first step to recover - for the patient as well as for the society. “In Guatemala nobody speaks about sexual violence”, says Fabio Forgione. “Survivors are stigmatized and they don’t find treatment in Guatemala yet. There are no resources and too little comprehension for patients needs by doctors.”

Information, education, communication

After setting up a laptop and a beamer in the clinic’s waiting room, the nurse Susanna Escobar starts to shout. “Today I want to talk to you about sexual violence and how it can be treated.” She has to raise her voice to reach the 50 odd people waiting for the general practitioner. But the mainly female patients are thankful for a diversion from waiting, and today it’s an educational film. The educator nurses of MSF go into the community and schools to inform on the medical consequences of rape and the existing facilities to treat it.

The constant contact with the population shows results. 100 people of whom usually four are men now seek treatment every month. They come either to the two clinics in the most violent areas or the General Hospital, all in which MSF is present. The acts of sexual violence the teams see are split between domestic rape and acts carried out by unknown people, mostly suspected

gang members. Survivors of gang related sexual violence mostly come within the important first 72 hours. The educators are very often the first contact for patients.

In the clinic, Susanna finishes her speech: “If you have experienced sexual violence or know somebody who has, please come to us, you will get help, free of charge, totally confidential.”

Confidentiality was absolutely important for Maria. She is still afraid that these seven men will come back to carry out their threat. This touches a condition that MSF can't solve: impunity. Survivors often don't press charges for fear of retaliation; doctors sometimes don't treat survivors out of the same reason. The chances of a legal conviction for sexual violence in Guatemala are nearly zero. What MSF can do for civil society is publicly repeating its three simple messages: Sexual violence is a medical emergency, there is free and confidential treatment. It is important to come within 72 hours.

Maria has received treatment within this time. She didn't get infected with HIV, she didn't get pregnant. Together with the psychologist she was able to calm the biggest fears and the feeling of guilt and anger. It will take time until the emotional wounds have healed and some of it will remain for ever: “I was scared if I can ever have a relationship, that I will be accepted how I am. Scared that nobody wants me for not being a virgin any more”, she says.

“I can't think of anything like sex. I would think of what these guys did to me if I was with my boyfriend. I imagined being alone with a bottle of Champaign afterwards. I imagined it to be romantic. But I haven't lost hope that this will happen.”



Clinic in Zona 18: Distributing information on sexual violence





A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

THE FIRST 72 HOURS: A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

“Sexual violence is a medical emergency”, says Silvia Dubón, medical doctor of MSF in the clinic in the Zona 18, one of the most violent districts in Guatemala City. “Often victims of sexual violence are exposed to a certain number of sexual transmitted diseases. If they are not treated in time this can result in serious health problems.”

Guatemala has one of the world’s highest rates of violence. In the country’s capital, MSF treats the population that suffers the worst from their violent environment and receives the least support: survivors of sexual violence. Lacking resources and awareness, Guatemala has still neither medical nor psychological treatment for people who have experienced rape. In 2007 MSF started to fill this gap. Only two years later, 100 patients receive medical and psychological treatment every month by the teams of MSF.

Preventing HIV

“It is a fact not widely known, that we can actually prevent HIV even if the patient has been infected”, explains Silvia Dubón. “It’s important to come within 72 hours after the attack. If we start giving anti-retroviral medication within this timeframe, we can prevent the spreading of the HI Virus in the body.” Unwanted pregnancy can be prevented within five days after the attack and Hepatitis B within three months. Other sexual transmitted diseases like Syphilis, Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea can be treated at any time.

MSF has started the programme for survivors of sexual violence in Guatemala in 2007. Every point of entry consists of a multidisciplinary team which treat patients on several levels. Silvia Dubón explains: “Recently we had a teenager who came with her mother after she was violated by her own step-brother. Our social worker first found out that the step-brother had threatened to kill both the patient and the mother if they did anything. So while I started to examine the girl, the social worker got in contact with a women’s groups who would take both out of this potentially dangerous environment.”

The patient's trust

During the first medical consultation, the medical doctors focus on building the trust of the patient which is needed to be able to intervene. “It is a matter of helping the patient to calm down, listening to the story with empathy while avoiding over victimization”, says Silvia Dubón. Then a medical evaluation is done, and in case of major injuries or suspicions a referral will be made to Roosevelt Hospital or San Juan de Dios Hospital in Guatemala City.

When this is ruled out, samples are taken and diagnostic tests are done for sexually transmitted diseases. Depending on how early the patient comes and the analysis of the doctor, the medical



intervention can include morning after pill, post exposure prophylaxis for HIV/Aids, an Hepatitis B and Tetanus vaccination, , anti nausea medication to counter the side effects of antiretroviral pills, and antibiotics if required.

Any treatments are accompanied with patient education, and follow up visits are organized at the end, along with confirming that the patient is connected to the rest of the MSF services.

In the clinic of the Zona 18, the violated teenager has received all necessary treatment. She will find a place in a safe environment, far away from the violent step-brother. While she is waiting for the results of the HIV-test, she is already seeing an MSF-psychologist where she is supported in overcoming the emotional trauma of the rape.



Zone 7: One of the most violent areas in Guatemala, MSF supported clinic nearby

CIRCLE OF TRUST: A PSYCHOLOGICAL EMERGENCY

Guatemala has still not developed a national service that gives survivors of sexual violence psychological support. MSF fills this gap in the capital city and now supports 100 patients per month overcoming their emotional trauma.

The first contact Karina had with MSF was when her mother brought her to the clinic. They eventually were forced to seek treatment because Karina didn't have her period for a long time. Mother and daughter learned about the service of MSF in the ministry of justice where they had denounced the rape.

Karina went to the clinic "Amparo Dos" in the capital's district Zona 7. She was received by Wendy Mérida, one of the psychologists MSF has posted in the state run clinic. "The girl has a very hard time talking about it. She is very quiet. It's hard to become a mother as a consequence of sexual violence", Wendy Mérida explains. "Now the baby is four months old, Karina is just 13. Her friends go to school and play while she is a mother. It is very hard for her to reorganise her life."

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Manifestations of abuse

Es obvio que la violación sexual es algo muy delicado que afecta "First of all, sexual violence is an act of power and humiliation", explains Mayra Rodas, psychological coordinator with MSF. "It is an experience for which nobody will ever be prepared. Therefore this constitutes a trauma."

Sexual violence has a variety of manifestations. "There is anger, fear and isolation. The strongest feeling is guilt", says Mayra Rodas. "Victims often ask themselves over and over again: Why was I there? Why was I dressed that way? Why didn't I defend myself? Why didn't I scream? Did I provoke the attack? Is it my fault?"

Sexual violence also comes in many different forms: It comes from either within the family, from fathers, uncles, cousins or from strangers, single incidents or acts related to gang activities. MSF sees a split between known and unknown perpetrators. Sexual violence can happen to all social groups of a society. While the majority of patients are women, MSF records about four percent men seeking treatment.

Wendy Mérida goes back through the sessions she had with Karina and the many other survivors: "They keep having the stigma of a violated woman. This is especially hard in this machismo society where the value of womanhood is based on virginity. Further they fear that it can happen again - because it can happen at any time."

Women in a patriarch world

To understand why sexual violence is such a pressing problem in Guatemala, Mayra Rodas goes back to history: "We are a country that has a lot of violence. We have a history of 30 years of war which has not been solved. Women are vulnerable. We live in a machismo and patriarch society. Women are treated as objects which can be taken. Women have less self-esteem due to the conditions we were born into. To be a woman here is like being garbage. This is what our patients tell us."

"Sexual violence is something that marks you but it is possible to come over it", says Mayra Rodas. "When sexual violence happens from the outside we can appeal to the patient that the relationship with the family remains, that her family is different. If rape happens in the family it is more difficult: the first circle of confidence broke. The therapy then will take much longer."

"In many cases our work is abstract. It is only words. Often I have to say that I don't have a pill or a vaccination to make you feel better", explains Wendy Mérida. "It is a process of getting to know your feelings so that you can talk about it. Every person has a totally different story. We try to enable the patient to express herself."

Re-establishing the circle of confidence

Wendy Mérida gives an example of a strategy she also used with Karina: "The first step to go with a patient is to bring back a sense of confidence. For this we build the characteristics of trust."

For this Wendy asks the patient: "Do you trust someone?" The patient maybe answers: "Yes, my mom." Then the psychologist asks: "So what characteristics does she have?" And might receive following answer: "She is lovely, she is honest." They continue with other persons so that they can create a list of individuals the patient trusts. Then patient and psychologist find out that the aggressor has different characteristics. With this the patient sees that the aggressor is a totally different person than those she trusts. "So we establish that the aggressor was only one individual and the other persons you can trust in, are just that: others. The patient can learn to choose in which person she trusts."

Psychologists are an integral part of a multidisciplinary MSF-team consisting of medical personnel and social workers. It also

includes educators who spread the knowledge of the programmes existence. “When the people come to us, they often say they didn’t know that a service as this existed and that they could be treated at all”, says Mayra. “The people are grateful to receive our treatment within the two national clinics in confidence and free of charge. We are in these places because the people don’t have the resources to pay for such treatment. Even if they could, often enough the medication or psychological support is not available.” And she concludes: “I hope that Guatemala will realise that sexual violence is a medical and psychological emergency.”

Karina is still in the long and hard process of recovery. For the 13-year-old it was difficult to give birth, she had to undergo a caesarean section, she saw her body change so much, she found that very hard to cope with. Something helped her, was that the aggressor is now in prison. It gives her security and the feeling of justice. She found a way out of this fear.



AWARENESS: AN EDUCATIONAL EMERGENCY

In Guatemala City, MSF has started an educational campaign explaining the consequences of sexual violence and that there is free and confidential treatment. As a result, more and more patients come to seek treatment in a country where talking about rape is still a taboo.

Daily routine in the two clinics in the capitals districts Zona 7 and Zona 18: Educator nurses Susanna Escobar and Sylvie Bachmann set up a beamer, a laptop, flyers and a box with medication in the waiting rooms. “May I have your attention, today I want to tell you about the consequences of sexual violence and how MSF can treat the consequences. A treatment that is free of charge and totally confidential.”

Guatemala has one of the world’s highest rates of violence. In the country’s capital, MSF treats the population group that suffers the worst from their violent environment and receives the least support: survivors of sexual violence. Lacking resources and awareness, Guatemala has still neither appropriate medical nor specific psychological treatment for people who have experienced rape. In 2007 MSF has started to fill this gap. In a country where sexual violence is a taboo and patients are stigmatized, MSF has introduced educator nurses to make the public talk, to make survivors seek treatment. Only two years later, 100 patients receive medical and psychological treatment every month by the teams of MSF.

First point of contact

Back in the clinic: The educators have to raise their voice to receive attention. But it works. They show a film in which a young actress plays a survivor, showing what rape did to her and how she received support. The film catches the audience. It is mostly women who wait for the general practitioner; they seem happy about some entertainment. The transported message comes as a bonus. Then the nurses come forward and talk about the treatment service of MSF. They explain how important it is to come within 72 hours after a rape, because antiretroviral medication can prevent the spreading of HIV in the body. This raises eyebrows and brings the audience to discuss. Preventing HIV/Aids, even if it was transmitted? That is new.

The educators give out flyers with the location and times where treatment can be obtained. “During these talks it often happens that women come to ask for help”, Sylvie Bachmann, MSF nurse from Switzerland explains. “I remember a woman who was very tall and looked very tough. She told me that she was raped by her father years ago. This event had pushed her out of her life so much that she joined a local gang and became a heavy criminal. But she sought treatment nevertheless.”

Therefore it is very often the educator nurse who is the first contact for a potential patient. She is observing the patients reaction to the awareness video identifying women who might be in crisis.

The patient is then contacted, personally and discreetly, and is then offered the service.

The clinic is a first point of contact but this is not enough. The knowledge of the treatment possibilities in the clinics has to be spread in the communities. “Next to the clinic in the Zona 7 live hundreds of illegal squatters. Sometimes they have electricity, sometimes they don’t”, says Sylvie Bachmann. MSF works closely with community leaders in the two districts. It is only with their support that MSF can multiply the efforts that one educator per district can take. “I go into these settlements as well as in schools, I organise informative talks with the people”, explains the Swiss nurse.

Meanwhile in the Zona 18, Susanna Escobar visits the school Las Canoas which is at the rural end of the district. Today she will work with a group of adolescents. The students all wear school uniforms. The teacher introduces Susanna and the educator of MSF starts her work. What is sexual violence? She puts up pictures of Barbie-like drawings of a man and a woman. When the youngsters recognize the features they giggle shyly.

Spreading the news

What is rape, Susanna asks the students. “To have a sexual relation with someone who doesn’t want to” says one. “This is a brilliant definition”. The colleagues applaud. Susanna explains the importance of coming within 72 hours after the rape and the treatment possibilities.

The reason of the nurses going to schools is not only to teach students about sexual violence and HIV. It is also probably the first contact of the students with the knowledge of the existence of MSF’s programme. “After the speech we usually stay for some more minutes at the school”, explains Susanna. “Very often they contact us either there or afterwards about some cases of sexual violence.”

She ends the speech with a similar advice as in the clinic: “Here is the telephone number of MSF. If you have experienced sexual violence or know somebody who has, then you can just call this number and you will receive support.”

She hands out flyers about MSF’s service to the headmaster and leaves. “Today there was a girl in the speech who started to cry”, Susanna summarizes the day. “I will now give her the flyer and some recommendations. Either if it is her or someone she knows, this person can now come to the clinic.”

The educational efforts of MSF together with community leaders and authorities soon show results. Since the start of the educational activities ten months ago, the number of admissions in the MSF programme has risen to 500 patients in the first half of 2009. This also comes through a better knowledge of MSF’s treatment service in the communities which the educator nurses are responsible for.



Education: MSF activities in the clinics and the surrounding neighbourhoods



Esther: Survivor of sexual violence



TWO HISTORIES OF SURVIVORS

A PATIENT'S HISTORY: MARIA

One (statt a) day in the park. A couple of girls enjoy a free Sunday. They play happily. One of these girls got raped by seven men. You couldn't tell which one. The physical wounds might already be gone. The emotional scars are still there. And they are invisible. She can't speak openly about it because she fears for her life. How could that have happened?

"The biggest change is that I am scared all the time. I was scared before but now I cannot even walk alone. I think that they might be still somewhere around. I am scared of people I don't know, I am scared of men I don't know. The feeling that they touch me gives me panic.

My father is a taxi driver and my mother makes tortillas. With my mother I am fine but I have a better relationship with my father I tell him everything. Everything that happens to me, even bad stuff.

On that day I told my mum that I would go to the house of my brother. I went to a bus station which is a five blocks from my house. I was in the bus when a black car crossed the road. From the car two guys came in with a cloth covering their face. They only went to me and nobody else. I couldn't do anything. They pointed a gun at my head and forced me to go with them. They blindfolded me. They took me to a place that I didn't recognize. They took me to a room. They started raping me. They were beating me up. There were seven of them."

"They will kill me"

"I had four brothers but now I only have three left because one is dead. He was 33. They killed him for his mobile phone. The only thing what they told me is that they are going to kill me. They said they want to kill me because of my brother, probably it's the same people who had murdered him. They were probably from the Maras, they do this very often. They want to show the girl their power but this is not how it should be. If you want to make love to someone it should be out of love. If she is forced it feels ugly.

From what they were doing to me I thought they would kill me. Like it often happens in Guatemala. I really thought they are going to kill me. There was a guy who was defending me. The only one who didn't touch me, who didn't do anything to me. This guy told the others not to beat and rape me. Maybe he knew me from before. They took me at eight in the morning. At four in the afternoon they finally let me go. The guys had fallen asleep and the only one awake was the one who helped me. He gave me my clothes and let me go. He gave me a sweater with which I could cover my face. They told me if I would press charges they would kill my family. So I didn't do it. Then I went to the street. There was a lady in a car. She asked me what happened.

I asked her to bring me to Metro Norte. My father was already expecting me there. My mum said that she would bring me to the



clinic. The doctor was about to make a check. When he found out that I was raped he didn't touch me. He called MSF. When I came there they started to check my wounds. They gave me right away about 15 pills. I didn't like them and even less the injections. They gave me some medication that I had to take for 28 days. Then I waited for the result after a blood test. I was really nervous if I was pregnant or HIV positive. But thanks to god and the medication they gave me the results were all negative.

"They don't have the money for treatment"

It just kept coming back, everything they did to me. I couldn't stop thinking of it. I was thinking of it while I was eating. So I stopped eating. I was dreaming and it all came back to me, then I woke up and I couldn't fall asleep anymore. That's where I met with the psychologist of MSF and then it got better. She helped me a lot. Thanks to her I could carry on and here I am. In the beginning I saw her quite often. They are really good people because they help me a lot. In my Colonia they are quite known because they put up flyers.

In Guatemala are a lot of poor people and they don't have the money for treatment when they get ill. What I would like to do in my future is to become a doctor. I like to help people. If I was a doctor I wouldn't charge the poor people. But I didn't study this year because I hadn't have money for it.

Then I was also scared if I can ever have a relationship, that I will be accepted how I am. Scared that nobody wants me for not being a virgin any more. I was a virgin when it happened and I can't think of anything like sex. Right now I don't want to hear anything about it. I would think of what these guys did to me if I would be with my boyfriend. I imagined being alone with a bottle of Champaign afterwards. I imagined it to be romantic. But I haven't lost the hope that when I am in a couple that this will all happen.

I feel good telling about it. I feel calm when nobody knows that it's me. I don't feel bad saying it. As I said, I didn't ask for what's happened to me. I want this video be shown in other places because I believe it doesn't only happen here. There are some girls that don't get over it. But thanks to god I did.



A PATIENT'S HISTORY: ESTHER

She is a young woman with a beautiful laugh. She sits in her room in front of her books and tries desperately to concentrate on her studies. At the moment this is all she has left. She can't enjoy going to a dance or the movies anymore. But she is not alone. There is the necessary support that accompanies her on the way to normality.

"The first night was very difficult. I had dreams about what happened to me. I cried a lot. I couldn't sleep for a few nights. I was scared to have dreams about it and it might come back. I see in my dreams the moment when he pushed me against the wall and lift my skirt and did all the stuff. I had the image of his face in my mind. I will never forget that. He was fat, dark with long hair, with a moustache.

It was the 23rd of March this year. I had my last exams. I woke up late so I went really quickly. There are two roads to my school. One goes through Zona 1 and one through the bus terminal. The quicker one goes through the bus station. I didn't even have breakfast. I ran out of the house with my bag-pack. I walked to the bus stop and there was a guy who pushed me to a wall. He took all my stuff to look for money. I thought this would be the only thing he did. But no. It was daylight, eight in the morning and he raped me. It was very difficult for me to accept this. I didn't have a relationship before. I was a virgin."

"They just laughed"

"In Guatemala there are a lot of people who don't help you. There were many people around and they just laughed. They don't help because they are scared. I don't know if the guy had a gun. I had a lot of marks from him all over my body and between my legs. I had his fingerprints on my body. He shut my mouth and I bit him. I couldn't scream. Then he just left me on the ground. A lady helped me. She told me to go home. But I had to go finish my exams. I was really frightened about my exams. I went to school. My teachers and friends were around. I couldn't even talk. I really wanted to finish my exams. They told me not to worry about this. So I calmed down a little bit.

The headmaster asked me if I wanted to go to the terminal to look if I see him. My parents came. I went to my father and he was very nice to me. We went directly to the ministry of justice filed a legal report.

I felt very dirty.

After it had happened to me, I didn't go to school for the first week. I didn't want to do anything. I just wanted to stay in my house. I closed myself so that nobody could hurt me. But only with the help of my surroundings and mainly god I could go on. I am still a bit scared but much calmer now.

Then I went to see MSF for the medical and psychological treatment. Now it is much easier to talk about it because it is already two months. But one week ago I would have cried or not talked anyway. I met Wendy, the psychologist from MSF. I also met the doctor who gave me medication against Hepatitis B. They examined me for syphilis and HIV. Something I would have never imagined to go through. Thanks to god they all went negative. But I still have to be under control for the rest of the year. I have to take the antiretroviral and pills against nausea. It was quite a bomb for my stomach.

I am happy that I am not pregnant. I would have kept it because it was not the fault of the child. But it would be difficult because it would have the face of the one who raped me."

"I spoke while many didn't"

"They told me to talk about it. It is not good to keep it inside. They told me I am brave because I spoke while many didn't. So I talked. I have been seeing MSF for two months now. When I had my second breakdown I thought about killing myself. I didn't have the sense to live. I asked myself why? I didn't have a logical explanation why that happened to me. The psychologist said there is never a why. We are not selected, those who got raped. There is only one way to go on. I still have so many dreams and goals which I won't give up just because what happened to me. My life went really down. But then the MSF-psychologist gave me antidepressants. I still take them. I would sleep the whole day. When I went back to my studies I had difficulties since some teachers didn't believe me. They said I am not in school because I don't want to.

I don't want to depend on antidepressants. Sometimes I have these famous flashbacks. A few days ago I saw a bus and the guy. It all went back to me. It seems they are really doing something to get him. I always had the fear that I will be violated. My uncle touched me twice. He touched my genitals. I was asleep and he touched me under my skirt. I was 14 years old and knew what's happening. Although I didn't know him so much, I really liked him. He was always a very good person to me. So we stopped having relations with these relatives. My parents trusted me when I told them. My grandmother said I was a troublemaker.

The same thing happened to my mother. What was different was that my grandmother didn't help her. She told her to wash herself and it will be ok. My grandmother still has doubts if it had really happened. My mother told me so that I knew I wasn't the only one. For her it was difficult, too, I never knew this happened.

I will never get into a bus anymore. I haven't been in one for two months. Maybe there will be a moment when I have to do it. My father won't be always there. He also needs his life and space. The people who walk on the streets or use public transport have to pray to god. You never know who would be the one killing the driver or assaulting the passengers.

“Never safe in Guatemala”

I want to live rather in Antigua than Guatemala City because it is more and more dangerous every year there. In Guatemala the Maras have the power, there is a lot of delinquency; the people are unscrupulous. People who don't care to kill or rape someone. It doesn't matter which class you are from. You are never safe in Guatemala. The public transport is terrible, they kill the drivers. To walk on the streets in Guatemala is quite difficult. This country is so corrupted. The Maras pay the police and everyone. Sometimes it is more secure to talk to the Gangs than to the police.

They stole the mobile phone from my sister, they robbed my father, and a woman with a knife took my wallet a few blocks from my school. Now this happened to me.

The psychologist said that it's up to me if I tell this to my boyfriend. I don't want to run around with a flag saying I was raped. On one side I want to tell those with who I will be. In Guatemala men are quite macho, if you are not a virgin you are whatever. My mom told me, yes, you are still a virgin in front of the eyes of god. My concept of virginity has changed a lot. I always imagined it to happen with someone I love. The love of my life. In the house, on the beach, with candles and flowers. I would like to meet some nice guy, a good husband. Somebody like my father. If I had a husband like him I would be really glad. My parents have been married for 19 years already.

Since then I came really closer with my family. Since then I have a completely different perspective of seeing things. I don't think of everything so romantic, pink and nice. It is just not like it. I think I have grown up a lot. For my age I am quite grown up. It is difficult to see a 17-year-old girl like me speaking like this. All these things made me grow up.”



VIOLENCIA

SEXUAL

