

Worker Mismanagement of Marital and Child Abuse

Jul 4

Hi everyone,

I'm Tamara Gómez from Colombia. Please excuse mistakes since English is not my first language. I wanted to talk to you about my experience within the meetings. I first met the Friends and a Worker named Michael Hassett around 2002 after a terrible car accident my family suffered in Quito, Ecuador.

They were very charming and loving and I was surprised why this foreign people (all of them from Canada) were so interested in us, with such a love and care for our situation. That really made an impression on me. Then I was invited to my first gospel meeting, by that time I was at university in Ecuador.

Several months later, I professed. Eventually most of the maternal side of my family professed too. We regularly attended, most of them still do, meetings in Ecuador and Colombia. Women are told to be presented in very modest clothing in order to not be a temptation for other men or workers, we are told to be submissive to men. We, as women lived a very isolated life since we look so different to other women in our fields, work or study places, we rarely make friends with other people outside the group. Men look almost "normal," so they really don't have to deal with the rejection, bullying or jokes from others.

Women aren't explicitly discouraged to pursue studies but most of them marry young and stay at home or work in family businesses. I was a single mother at a young age (17) and I studied medicine and later specialized in a clinical field, so my understanding of the outside world was bigger, but that didn't prevent all the brain washing I suffered.

When The Truth was starting "the Work" in a small Colombian city in the Border of Colombia -Ecuador called Ipiales, many members were curious about the money, how the organization works, the hierarchy and all that stuff but they were told that they cared more of the mundane stuff than the spiritual things and that they should put their heart to the message from God they were bringing to us and not all those small things.

I have witnessed very concerning ways to deal with spousal or sexual abuse. If you are being beaten by your husband (even being both part of The Truth) the right thing to do is to stay with him and pray harder for his soul, and beware of not provoking him to hit you. I know a girl who was in her 20's she was beaten so hard by her husband (both professing)

that she flew to her parents' home, and was convinced by her parents and Workers of the field that she has to stick to the husband she chose, since marriage is forever, and not be temptation for him to sin (it means hit her).

I knew of a female worker who was married in her country to another professing alcoholic guy that used to hit her so hard she was hospitalized several times, and she claims that God told her to leave him because she was going to be the cause of the loss of his soul if he finally killed her.

I know 2 now grown men who were sexually abused when they were kids by a worker in Ecuador and were told to heal in silence, and the worker was sent to another country.

I know a family where the grandfather and father sexually abused daughters and granddaughters during many years and are now are elders, and I know that the Workers knew about this situation years ago.

I eventually married a professing guy from Argentina, *[name redacted]*. He was constantly jealous and felt very threatened by my education and the fact that I, being a physician, was the main provider of our home, so he started psychologically abusing me, was very jealous and controlling in ways so damaging to my brain and soul that I cried almost every night of our first year of marriage. He was jealous of family members, friends, workers, everyone. In this first year I fought back this conduct and we decided to speak with the Senior Worker of Colombia about it, Munro MacAngus.

I thought he was going to help me and at least scold my husband, but what a surprise was when the thing he said was "well I know from now on Tamara would never give you any other reason to make you mad or jealous of her".

So I started living by that premise. I was constantly walking on shells around him, I gave him the money I made for him to manage, I accepted that he chose my clothes, who I talked to, who I was associated to, what kind of jobs to accept etc. I completely lost my personality, my whole self was erased in the marriage. Remember I was a single mother, and my daughter was 15 when I married. I made her call him dad and to be submissive to him too, and he years later started sexually harassing her for a year or so, showing himself naked, hugging her and taking advantage of the proximity to touch her close to the butt and breasts, staring at her when she went up the stairs, laying down next to her on the bed while she was asleep, etc.

I tried to think that those were just honest mistakes of an honest man, but deep down I knew the truth but I was a coward not able to accept it. My daughter started acting out, not wanting to go to meetings, changing her hair and clothing, being irritable and disrespectful all the time until she finally attempted suicide by ingesting the pills she was

prescribed by her psychiatrist. She never told her about the sexual harassment she was suffering so she was labelled with an anxiety and depression disorder medically speaking and just "trouble" in the fellowship.

I struggled with my maternal instincts and what I've been taught for almost 20 years, be submissive, be a peacemaker, obey your husband, marriage is sacred. I finally confronted [my husband] about the situation. I remembered one thing he said "Come on if I wanted to rape her I would have already done it".

When the Workers in our field (both female - Isabel Fica from Chile and Elizabeth Jennings from Ireland) learnt about the abuse the response was what you expect, I should stay married and since my daughter was now 18 she should leave the house and nobody should hear about the abuse to not taint "the truth". And she was blamed for the way she dresses, she behaves, she sits etc. As she was a young lady she was a temptation to my husband.

After several months of suffering and not sleeping I decided my marriage has to come to an end. So I kicked my husband out of the house. By that time the pandemic had arrived and I was the only provider for our home, so he had to fly back to Argentina to stay with his brother.

I continued to attend meetings only to be bullied and incessantly persuaded to "save" my marriage, to be told how much of a sin it was to make [husband's name redacted] leave home; I remembered Elizabeth saying my sin was bigger than his. Almost all the messages in the meetings were about the holiness of the marriage and how big of a sin divorce is.

The workers and I also became aware that my husband also abused his younger sister since she was 3 to 17 yo and also a young female cousin while growing up. That didn't stop them from keeping pressuring me to take him back. I was told I could not participate in the Sunday meeting if I don't repent from my sin. They even told me that if the money for the plane tickets was the problem, they would pay for them.

The bullying was so mortifying that I stopped going to meetings at all. My soon to be ex-husband, we are in the middle of the divorce process, is now back in Colombia and continues attending meetings and sometimes acts as an elder when there is no worker present. I doubt other people in the fellowship know about the true reason we separated and think that they believe I am just a bad and cruel woman, not only here in Colombia but I've been told it's how they see me in Argentina too.

The situation is reported to the competent authorities in my country, that can be checked. I'm now dealing with anxiety and depression too, and guilt, the guilt of not being able to act sooner and be brave enough. It's been 2 years now and I can now see how toxic, sexist

and dangerous environment "The Truth" is and how it enables abuse in so many ways affecting children and women all over the world.



WINGS Note: Overseer Percy Broughton is aware of these abuse cases