

Burundi: Natalie, how to recover a sense of dignity

Natalie* is 28, a university student in her second year, when political violence engulfs her native Burundi. As the daughter of an impoverished family, she takes a job to pay for her university fees.

Policemen are regular visitors to her workplace. They drink beer and flirt with her. Two of them repeatedly ask to have sex with her. As she continuously rebuffs their advances, the pair start threatening her.

Natalie takes the matter to the policemen's commanding officer, but he refuses to do anything about it. One day, the two men follow Natalie and forcibly take her to an abandoned house, where they rape her.

The young woman takes refuge in another country. She starts to regularly get sick, so she takes an HIV test and finds out that she is seropositive, as a consequence of the rape.

Natalie has still not quite accepted her illness. Like many other victims, she has a sense of shame. Worse, she never found the courage to tell her family what happened. To this day, her relatives don't even know if she is still alive. Like all the other survivors of sexual violence we have spoken to, she believes in justice - though she is not very sure where justice could come from. For Natalie, only the arrest of her attackers would allow her to recover her sense of dignity and start rebuilding herself.

**Not her real name*