

# **Mental illness but strong heart and responsibilities for her fatherless children**

Kaw Kaw

Ma Aye Chaw was only 16 years old when she was raped by 3 men. She is now 39 years old. She grew up an orphan deserted by her siblings, and the neighbours who accuse her of being mentally ill. She says ***"I do not want to live with my family. I am really afraid of being a problem to them again. I am really afraid of men."***

Ma Aye Chaw tells her story. ***"The girl in the main road told me to go and have a snack (dish of something fried), but she took me so far away. At the same time, three men told us to go with them, and they followed us. After I ate the snack and on the way back home, when we reached the field, they started to rape me"***

Her body is skinny and she has a short hair style. All her front teeth are gone, so you cannot hear her voice clearly when she is talking. Mostly people see her as mentally sick but she seems very polite when she talks. She makes a living doing laundry, and her daily income is between 1500-2000 kyat (\$1.5 – \$2).

***"I felt strange when he pushed and raped me. When I arrived home, my sister beat me and told me that she felt ashamed of me. She told me to abort the child. She beat me when I told her that I cannot have an abortion and that I would give birth to this child. The child was a boy. A policeman adopted him. Now his life is prosperous."***

She was raped when reaching puberty, but she never gave up her life. She gave birth to the baby successfully. After that time, men raped her one by one without taking responsibility

for her. No one knew or understood her feelings better than herself. ***"My brother-in-law beat me until my skin was red".***

***"After that (the rape) I did not want to live in my house anymore, so I went outside. People called me bad names, and sexually assaulted me. I never feel like that before, I was blamed by other people."*** She expresses the feelings that she feels inside her heart.

She cannot protect herself because of her lack of knowledge, and she has no one by her side. Sometimes she shouts when people shout sexual insults at her, and sometimes people thought she consented to the men who raped her.

***"I said to the person who committed the sexual assaults, why are you doing this to me? My brother-in-law and my sister beat me, and swear at me. Later on men would come to my home. Even though I told them "I have children, don't do it" but they did not listen to me" .***

As a natural mother, she brings up her three innocent children by doing any work that is available in her community. None of the men who rape her take responsibility and support the children. In their mind, Ma Aye Chaw is a women who follows all men when they ask her to follow them.

***"When I was pregnant, I asked (the father) him to take responsibility for the child. But he told me that it was not his child. I did not know that I was pregnant. I felt dizzy and vomited when I washed the cloths. I asked people to do an abortion for me. But they do not do it for me so I needed to give birth to the child."***

She had to raise three children until they were grown up as a single mother without having a job. It is very difficult for her to raise three children without having a job. ***"I had to wash people's clothes door to door during my pregnancy. I do not have a chance to eat healthy and nutritious food during my pregnancy. At that time I only received 500 Kyat per day.***

***Other people give me baby clothes when I give birth."***

She wants to wear beautiful clothes as other women wearing do. ***"I have to wear second hand clothes that are given by other people after they have worn them. I want to wear nice clothes and live well."*** Among her three children, she asked the girl child to stay with her. The eldest child lives in a monastery. He brings back food that is left in the monastery for her mother. She is proud of her son for taking care of her.

She says ***"The reason that I do not dare to go outside anymore is because I have a girl child and I am afraid of men who will sexually assault me, I cannot live a stable life."***

***"The surrounding people believe that she is crazy and a mentally sick person and has many husbands."*** Ma War War Kyawn from North-Okkalapa does not think as other people think. She said "People take advantage of her weaknesses as a person with a mental problem. ***"Women are taken advantage of because of their mental problem and their livelihood not going well. Because of these two reasons people ask me to work without paying me fairly. Men take advantage of my mind, for sex, and physical abuse as well. It is unacceptable"***.

***"Ma Aye Chaw's parents passed away when she was a child. She lived with her sister. No one has raised her. Because of this she lives as she wants to."*** said Ma War War Kyaw. Most people say that she is mentally sick but she has a mother's kind heart. When she was oppressed by most people she does not have a chance to say anything. She lost her right as a woman. It seems to be like she continues her life like as people say".

In order for other women's lives to be protected, and not to turn out like Ma Aye Chaw's life we need laws to protect women from sexual assault, and to take strong action against men who break the law. If we can do this, then we can protect other teenager girls from sexual assault.