

# SPEAK

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**BREAKING THE SILENCE**

**WOMEN SAY OUR MEN MUST STOP BEATING US**



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SPEAK Collective members are: Gill, Irna, Karen, Phumelele, Shamim and Vanessa.

The government's State of Emergency stops us from being free to write about many important things. If there was no State of Emergency, we would be able to write about these things.

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## THANKS

We thank the women who told us their stories for our article "Breaking the Silence - Women Say Our Men Must Stop Beating Us." We thank the women who helped to arrange interviews, who gave their ideas, and to POWA for their help. We thank Sanna for her drawings and her support.

The cover drawing is by Sanna Naidoo.

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# ◆ SPEAK ◆

a  
magazine for women

In this issue of SPEAK women told us how they have put up with being beaten by husbands because they are expected to. There are women who will read this SPEAK and feel that they are not alone. We want women to write about this problem and about other problems they face as women. Let us speak about these problems and share ideas of how to deal with them.

We live fighting lives. The government has banned organisations that are fighting for a better life. The government has passed laws to make it more difficult for workers to fight in the factories. And they have started to use their laws to silence newspapers. But people still fight back. Most people dream of the day when we live in a South Africa that is free. Where there are jobs, and houses for everyone. And security in old age. Where there is time to relax. Where we have control over our lives. And where the colour of our skin does not matter.

We as women dream of these things. And we dream and fight for more. We dream of a South Africa where women are not beaten by their men. Where women are treated as equals, as friends, and as comrades.





# letters

Dear SPEAK

Thank you for such a wonderful magazine. I was very interested to learn from your SPEAK number 18 that Umlazi women have now decided to come together to share the problems they have. Thank you for making it easy for women to speak through SPEAK magazine. Keep up the good work!

Dudu  
Lamontville

Dear Dudu, we're glad you like SPEAK. The more women come together, the more they will be able to solve their problems! - SPEAK Collective.

Dear Friends

Congratulations on producing one of the liveliest and focused women's publications in the world. We are aware what difficulties must beset your work and marvel that you are able to produce such a spirited magazine in such circumstances. I would very much like to meet with you and discuss how you do it. Perhaps one day the opportunity will arise.

For the next issue of Women in Action, we would like to produce two items which appeared in Speak Aug/Oct 87. The first is on the struggles of domestic workers and the other on the campaign against skin lighteners. We hope this is alright with you. With best wishes for continued success.

Yours sincerely  
Niala Maharaj  
ISIS, Italy

Dear Niala, we are pleased that SPEAK is reaching all over the world. And we are glad that you want to use our articles. Could you just say that they are produced by SPEAK? We are very keen to have contact with women's groups all over the world. It is exciting to be able to write about how women everywhere are organising - SPEAK Collective.

Dear SPEAK

I have seen your latest copy of SPEAK and surely it is dynamic. I think you are improving day by day. The colour you've used for the cover is nice and bright.

I was very impressed by the picture you used on the cover those laughing women in front of a COSATU flag, shows that those women are happy with organisations like COSATU and it shows that women are part of the unions.

Your health article is fantastic, the pictures you've used makes one not to skip a page without reading. I suggest that you get somebody to write an article for SPEAK on Aids. I think that will also be an interesting health article because most people want to know what really happens when one has been affected by the Aids virus and they would love to know about the signs and symptoms of the disease.

Love  
Zandile  
Johannesburg

Dear Zandile, Your idea about having an article on Aids is a good one. We have decided that we will do this in the next issue of SPEAK. Thanks for your letter - SPEAK

## Have you got something to say?



Write a letter to SPEAK. Share your thoughts with others!  
Write to:  
SPEAK Collective  
PO Box 19375  
Domerton  
4015  
Durban



# BREAKING THE SILENCE

## WOMEN SAY

### OUR MEN MUST STOP BEATING US

Mary is sitting in a room with us. We have come to talk to her about wife beating. Mary has three teenage children. She lives with her children and her husband. Mary wears glasses. But her glasses are badly broken. When Mary came in, she was limping. Her leg looked a very strange shape. It had scars from being beaten. Her husband did this to her. We asked Mary about her glasses. Mary said: "Ja, he aimed a belt at me, and the buckle hit my glasses." Lucy is Mary's friend. She has also come to talk with us. Lucy said to Mary: "You are lucky it was only your glasses. Are you going to wait until you lose an eye?"

We spoke to Busi. She lives in another township in another city. She has two children. Her husband beats her. He has been beating her for the past sixteen years. She feels very alone with her troubles. She told us: "The whole yard hears my screams. He says he will kill me one day and I believe this. No one comes because they say that it is trouble between husband and wife." Busi has tried leaving home. He goes looking for her every time. And she keeps going back. Back to more beatings. She says: "I go back to the same swearings and beatings. He says he wants my money. I get very upset. But the funniest thing is that I am still hanging around this man."

Lindiwe is another woman we spoke to. Lindiwe was pregnant when her beatings started. She said: "Most of the time he usually carried a screwdriver or bushknife or knife, or whatever it is. Which he used as a weapon. He used to make me run around all over the location. I felt terrible for my kids. Because he used to shout and yell and I used to open the window to throw them out through the

window so that my neighbours could take them home to my mother."

#### THIS HAPPENS TO THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF WOMEN

As we spoke to Mary, Busi, and Lindiwe we felt very angry. We felt angry that such beatings happen to women. We felt angry because this beating of women is hidden away. It is a hidden crime. We felt angry because it is an accepted crime. Many people see nothing wrong with men who beat their wives. We felt angry because Mary, Busi and Lindiwe are not the only ones. Thousands and thousands of women are beaten by their husbands and boyfriends. Thousands and thousands of women live with faces bruised and bodies battered. Trying to hide what their husbands do to them. Trying to hide the hurt inside them as well. Is it not time that women broke the silence about this crime against them? Many women spoke out when SPEAK asked them about the beating of women that goes on.

#### WHICH MEN DO THE BEATING?

So what kind of a man beats his wife or girlfriend? The answer is all kinds of men. Rich men. Workers. Unemployed. White men and black men. Educated and uneducated. Old men and young men. All kinds of normal, everyday men beat their wives. We have talked to all kinds of women who are beaten by their husbands or boyfriends. We have met teachers, workers, unemployed women, secretaries, black women and white women, grandmothers and young newly married women. We have met women who are married to comrades who beat them at home. And we have met many women who say they don't ever want to marry. Many women say: "Who wants to be treated like a dog?"

## WHY DO MEN BEAT THEIR WIVES AND GIRLFRIENDS?

It is not easy to understand why men beat their wives and girlfriends. But we can begin to understand when we remember that women and men are not brought up as equals. Men everywhere are brought up to believe that they are more important and better than women. That it is men's right to own and control women. And women are brought up to believe that they are less important than men. And that it is their duty to serve men.

Busi said: "My husband would say that I think that I am too educated and too clever. I earn and he has no job. He accuses me all the time. He says that I think that I am better than him." Lindiwe said: "Men believe they own women. They are jealous of their women looking at or being looked at by other men." Some men lock their wives or girlfriends in the house. Some men expect their wives or girlfriends to report to them when they go anywhere. Even when they go next door to borrow some milk. They must report. But these same men do not report to their wives about where they go or what they do. Women have told us that they get beaten up for going to sleep before their husband has come home. Or for attending a union meeting.

## WHY DO MEN GET AWAY WITH SUCH A CRIME?

Mary said: "You know I was brought up on a

farm and everthing was behind closed doors. And we were always taught it doesn't matter what your husband does. You are married to him for better or worse. My mother told me, she says, 'You see my child you married him. You are married for better or worse.'" And so for many of us our world tell us to accept any treatment from men. It doesn't matter what. It can be beating, bashing, swearing.

And so this is how men get away with it. People say that a man has a right to beat his wife or girlfriend. And so women are expected to put up with being bashed in the face. Or kicked in the stomach, pregnant or not. Or even killed. People will turn their heads and say, 'It is his wife. She must have done something wrong.'

Some people say that unemployment, alcohol, dagga and overcrowded housing causes men to beat women. But everybody has problems. Why should men be allowed to take their problems out on women? Things like shebeens and poverty do make things worse. But they are not the root cause of the problem. As one woman said, "If you've had a few shots and you beat up your wife, you do it because you had it in mind anyway."

Men get away with beating their wives and girlfriends because they believe that they have a right to do what they like to women. But







Drawing by Sanna Naldoo

now we are living in times when everybody is struggling for the right to a decent life. Where people are treated as equals. Where women are treated like equals, not animals.

### **PEOPLE OPPOSED TO WOMEN ABUSE**

We spoke to women from an organisation called People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA). This organisation is in Jo'burg. POWA helps women who have been beaten. POWA said: "When we speak to women, they feel very alone. They live inside themselves. This beating up may have happened for years and years. It is important that women know that it happens to lots and lots of women. It happens because men are trying to tell women that they are in control." And POWA says that they want to help women to get control of their lives. Women's bodies get beaten. But women's feelings about themselves and what they are worth also get a terrible beating. And sometimes that hurt inside lasts forever.

Children learn from their parents. Men who beat their wives are teaching their sons to be batterers. And women who put up with it are teaching their daughters to put up with it.

### **WHY DO SO MANY WOMEN PUT UP WITH THIS LIFE?**

Most women struggle to find an answer to this question. But many women say there is the tradition that women must stay with their husbands. Also many women rely on their

husbands for money. And many women say, "We have nowhere to go. The townships are already overcrowded." And even if a woman can find a place to stay, it is not easy to start a new life. There is the worry of a job. Of children's schooling. Of who will look after young children. And the fear of being alone. And for some women not everything is bad about the man. There is some love. And a hope that the beatings will stop. A woman may want to leave, but she is scared that the man will come looking for her. After years of beatings many women start to believe that they are worth nothing. They feel guilty. They start to believe that they have done something to deserve a beating. It seems like a trap with no escape.

### **WHAT CAN A WOMAN DO?**

It helps to talk to someone you trust. Talking helps to see things clearly. It is a good idea to find out about the law. Then a woman can get advice on what it is possible to do. There are places where people will listen to and help beaten women. Some of these places are POWA in Jo'burg (011-642- 4345), Rape Crisis in Durban (031-232323) and Cape Town (021-479762), and some family and child welfare offices. These people don't tell a woman what to do. They help her to understand her position and to make her own decision.

If a woman wants to she can charge her husband with assault. She has to lay the charge at a police station. If he is found guilty he may have to pay a fine.

It is not easy for a woman to go to the police. She may be too afraid of her husband to go to the police. She may not have decided to leave him. She wants him to stop beating her, but she may not want him to go to jail, or lose his job. She may be dependant on his wages. And often the police will say that it is only a husband wife problem. The police say they don't want to interfere. As one woman said the police will wait until you have been killed before they will charge the man. A woman who is beaten by her husband can get a

Peace Order from the Magistrates Court. If she reports that he has beaten her again after the Peace Order has been issued, then they both go to court. If he is found guilty he faces a two year jail sentence with no choice of a fine. A woman who is beaten by her husband can get a divorce. She can apply for Legal Aid. If it is found that he has beaten her, then she has free legal help. She can sue her husband for maintenance for herself and the children.

If a woman decides she wants to leave home she can stay at a shelter for 3 months. There are shelters in Johannesburg and Cape Town. This helps a woman to start building her own life. But after 3 months she has to find her own way in the world.

### **AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL**

It is not only women who are beaten that must do something about this problem. All women can do something. An injury to one is an injury to all.

Women can help each other by talking about the problem. We must help each other to break the silence. And we must talk about ways in which we can stop men beating women. We can also do practical things. Like give someone who is running away from a beating or possible killing a place to stay. We

can help with looking after children. We can give each other support.

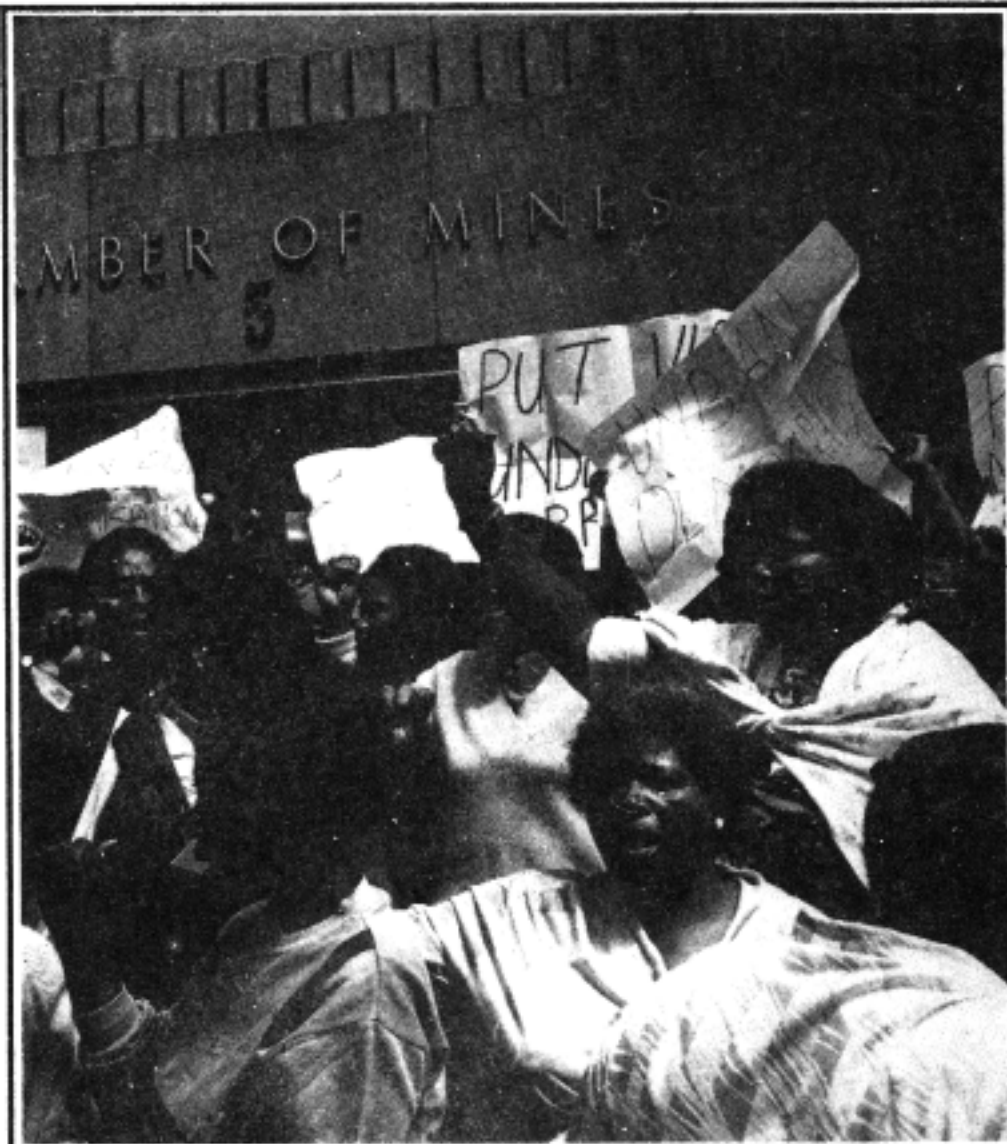
In another country called Peru women have come up with an idea of how to deal with their men. These women live in a poor part of the city. They decided that they had had enough of being beaten by their men. So they got together and made a plan. Each woman decided to carry a whistle. And when her husband comes to beat her she blows the whistle. And all the other women come running to her house. And they deal with the man! One man wanted his wife to leave their home with her five children so that he could bring his lover to live with him. The wife refused. So he kept beating her. All the women took action. They say: "So, one night when he was beating his wife up, we got hold of him, stripped him naked and hung a sign around his neck saying, 'I will never abuse my wife again.' After that he left and has not bothered her since."

This beating of women will not stop until women break their silence. It will not stop until men treat women as equals. It will not stop until women come together to talk and to organise. Women beating must be taken up as an issue in all organisations. The beating of women by men will not stop until women organise to stop it.





# YESTERDAY



Photograph by Afrapix

## WOMEN ON THE MARCH

It was a sight people in Johannesburg had not seen for a long time. Women were marching down the street, singing of a free South Africa. Heads came to windows of office buildings. People came out of shops. "Who are these women?" they asked. The women were making their voices heard against the bannings of their organisations. Against restrictions on leaders such as Albertina Sisulu. Against the repressive laws of this country and especially the Labour Relations Bill. This was International Women's Day.

The day of protest started at Chamber of Mines offices. The women handed in a letter of demands and protest. The women stood on the steps outside these offices holding placards. Then they went to the offices of the British consul. Four women went to meet the consul with a letter of their demands. The other women stood outside singing freedom songs. And from here they marched on to a meeting at Khotso House. A Federation of Transvaal Women member spoke to the women at the meeting. She said, "This is not the end. This is only the beginning."

## WOMEN DEMAND JUSTICE

The violence in Pietermaritzburg and other areas in Natal has been going on for a long, long time. Many people have lost loved relatives, friends and homes.

More than sixty women from different parts of Natal came together and went to the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg. Some of the women were from the Natal Organisation of Women. They demanded to see the Attorney General. The women told the Attorney General that they wanted him to do something about so many people dying in Natal. They also told him do something about people who kill and are left free. The women said that the 'kitskonstabels' cannot solve the problem.

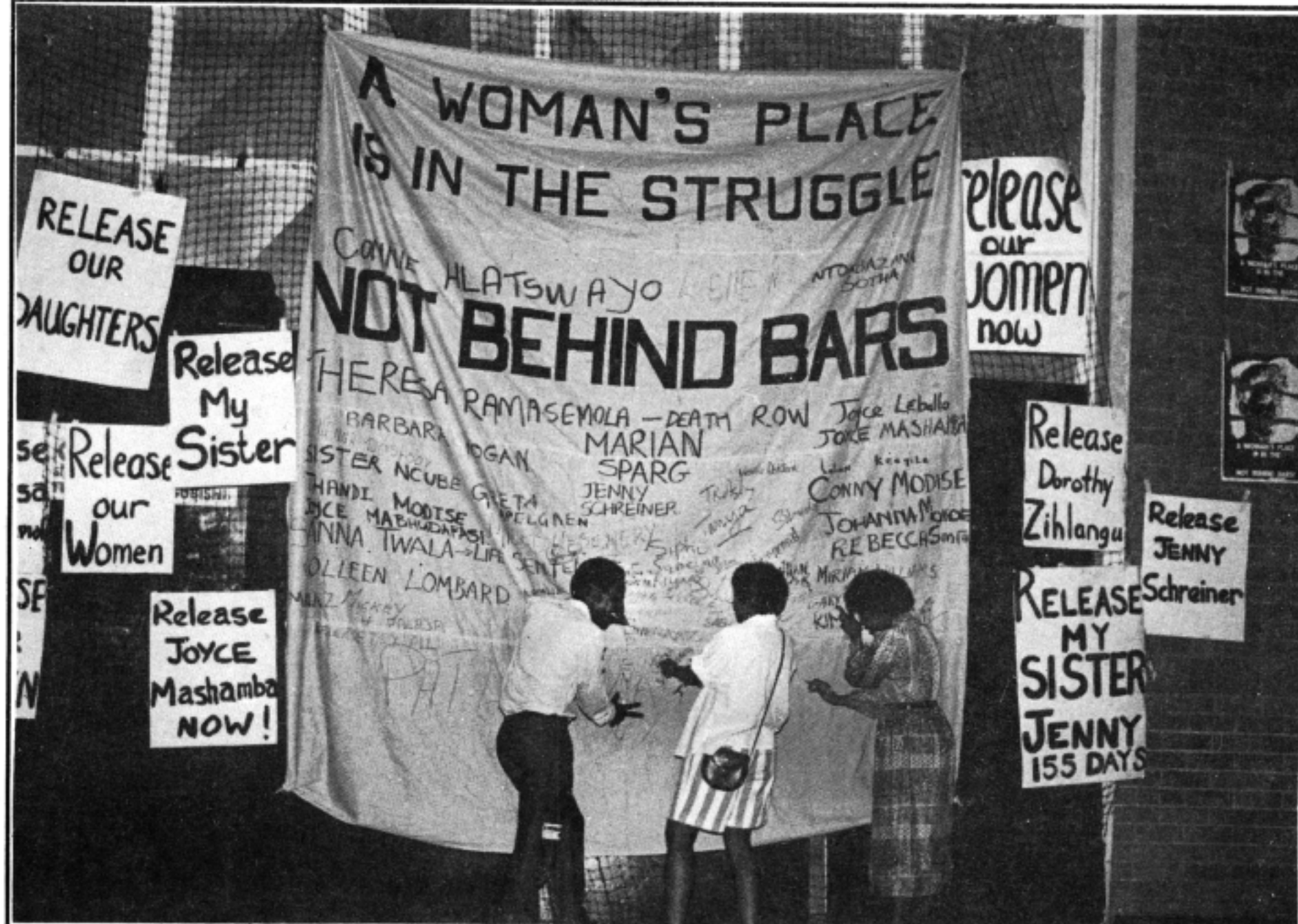
The women told the Attorney General that they were shocked to see 'kitskonstables' who had only three weeks training walking around with guns. They told him that the problems cannot be solved by shooting.

They demanded that the Attorney General uses his power to make sure that the killers are brought to courts and that police protect the people and not the killers. He promised to look into the matter.





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People at the "Bend the Bars" concert in Jo'burg in February this year. There are so many names because there is so little justice.

# AND TOMORROW

## WE REMEMBER THAT DAY

Did you notice the empty buses on 21 March this year? Did you notice the empty streets? Did you hear bosses say: but where are all the workers?

21 March is a day of remembrance. South Africans remember the day in Sharpville in 1960 when the police shot down and killed people who were peacefully protesting against unjust pass laws. This year thousands of people stayed at home. Because they still remember. And there is more to remember every year. This year people stayed at home as a way of saying to the government and the bosses: you have banned our organisations. But you can't ban our fighting spirit.

## NO TO 'SEX TOURS'

Women in Thailand are organising! They are angry because of the foreigners who come to their country on "sex tours." These tours are organised for men from Europe and other countries to come to Thailand to use women just for sex. In March this year, a group of women showed their anger. They held a demonstration at the airport in the city of Bangkok against these tourists. They said: "We're opposed to the tours because they make people think that women from Thailand can be easily bought - for a night or for a month."





Photograph by Afrapix

# STORIES DANCE and SONG

A dance at Fordsburg Women's Group's Women's Day celebration in 1986.



Photograph by Afrapix

Dancing and singing at Federation of Transvaal Women's Day in 1987.





Photograph by Afrapix

**Gcina Mhlope writes stories. She is telling a story at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.**



Photograph by Afrapix

**Young girls in a Gugulethu Dance Group in Cape Town.**



## WOMEN'S HEALTH DAY

May 28 is a special day for women all over the world. It is a day to talk and take action about women's health problems. Women from all over the world have been talking about this. Some governments spend lots of money sending men to the moon. Some governments spend lots of money on building up their armies. And beautiful houses for themselves. But how much money is spent on seeing to the health needs of the people?

One million women in the world die each year from problems with pregnancy, in childbirth and from backstreet abortion. Most of the women who die are from poor countries and from the poorer parts of rich countries. These women die because they do not have proper health services. Women die because they

work in factories where there are unhealthy working conditions. Women die because they do not have enough healthy food to make their bodies strong enough to carry babies in their wombs.

Women are saying that things must change. That we must tell more and more people about all the women who die each year in this way. On May 28 this year women all over the world want to meet, discuss and hold protests to make people aware.

If you want to find out more about this day, write to SPEAK.

Or write to Women's Global Network on Reproductive Rights, P.O. Box 4098 1009 AB Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Six young people from Sharpeville were sentenced to death for the murder of a community councillor which happened during unrest in the township. An angry crowd of people surrounded the councillor and he was killed. People have been protesting against the death sentence. They say there should be no death sentence for anybody. They say the killing of the councillor was because of the unfair way black people are treated in South Africa. Black Sash women protested outside parliament. The United Women's Congress in Cape Town and Natal Organisation of Women protested at offices of the British Consulate.

The death sentence against the Sharpville six has been postponed for a month because lawyers found new evidence on the case. We hope that the six are saved from death.



Photograph by Cedric Nunn, Afrapix

### WOMEN SAY NO TO THE DEATH SENTENCE

**Women from the Natal Organisation of Women protest about the death sentence of the Sharpville Six. Here they sing songs of freedom as they hand in a letter of protest to the British Consul in Durban.**





Photograph by SPEAK Collective

### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY IN DURBAN

There was fun. There were speeches. There was singing. There were plays. There was dancing. And there was serious talking. It was International Women's Day in Durban.

Different women's organisations helped to arrange the day. Women students were there. And the Natal Organisation of Women. And church women. And Rape Crisis, the Black Sash and SPEAK. It was a day that said a lot. Sister Bernard spoke. She is from the Federation of Transvaal Women. She said that women must organise for a better life. That women must put their words into action. That we have to work hard for that bright future that we want so badly. She said that she believes that women can achieve a lot.

Women from places where there is war going on spoke. They were from Pietermaritzburg, KwaMakhutha, Hammarsdale, KwaNdengezi. They made everyone feel sad and angry. They said that they were alive today, but that maybe we would never see them again. They said that houses are being burnt, people are being killed, and everyone lives in fear. Those who commit the crimes seem to be left free. But those who are for peace and justice get detained. The day ended with everyone singing. Everyone was sad and happy. Sad because of the terrible things happening in our country. But happy because so many women had come together to share their songs, stories and hopes.

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# ***YESTERDAY TODAY & TOMORROW***



# SISTERS

## BY ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI

She came as so many others like her had come, for advice and moral support. I had met her at meetings. she looked very unhappy. She said, "I have come to you because I have nowhere to go, I have been without a roof over my head for three weeks now. I have no money and nothing to live on. Give me some work. Otherwise the only place for me is the street".

I said, 'But I thought you worked. I thought you had a job".

She said, "I did have work. But I fell ill over three months ago. My baby fell ill. I had to give up work. My baby died. I could not get my job back".

I asked, "Have you separated from your husband? Why have you nowhere to go?"

"I walked out on him. And I would do anything rather than go back to him." She could not hold back the tears. "Forgive me", she said, "This is the first time I have cried. I couldn't before but when someone offers sympathy its hard to stay dry eyed. I'll tell you my story then you will understand.

She had met her husband while they were both fighting for a new world. Both believed that their dreams would come true. That they would win a better life for all people. They were real comrades fighting side by side. She became pregnant. They were married. She did not stay home for long. They put the child in a creche. They both worked outside the home.

When she was chosen to go to a conference, he was proud of her. She joked, "You won't make a scene when you get a cold supper, will you? He said, "what does it matter. Its love that mustn't be served up cold". They laughed



This is a true story. It was written in the 1920's. Alexandra Kollontai worked among women workers in Russia. This was when workers were fighting the rulers and the bosses for their rights. Kollontai became Minister of Social Welfare. In this story Kollontai

writes about a woman who came to her for help.

together. It seemed nothing could destroy their feelings for each other. They were not just husband and wife. They were comrades. They faced life hand in hand. They shared the same dreams. Their little girl grew up healthy. But then all this changed. How had it happened? The trouble seemed to start when he got a job in the company.

The company meant good pay. He said she should leave her job. But her work was important to her. At first things were fine. They moved to a bigger flat. He was off travelling for the company for three months. When he got back she sensed it was a stranger who had returned. He didn't listen to her. He hardly looked her way. He began to dress smartly and use scent. He was hardly at home for even five minutes. And he started drinking. She tried to talk to him. But he was silent.

The drinking became worse. She was very worried. She wondered whether he had stopped loving her.

At her work they were reducing the staff. She



was worried she would lose her job. And at the same time her baby became sick. Her husband was never there to share her troubles. She said, "I was sitting one night with my sick child when the bell rang. I went to open the door. I was pleased my husband had come. I hoped he was sober so that I could share my worries with him. I opened the door. At first I could not understand. A young woman was with him. 'Let me in,' my husband said, 'I've brought along a girlfriend. We are going to enjoy ourselves and don't you interfere.'

He was so drunk he could hardly stand up straight. I let him in and hurried to my child. I locked the door. I sat trembling. I did not even feel angry. I felt hurt. I could hear everything in the next room. I would have like to sit with my hands over my ears, but I had my sick baby to care for.

The next evening he came home earlier than usual from work. My heart was heavy. I reached for my coat. I decided I must leave. He caught my arm roughly. He grabbed my coat and began to shout at me. He said I would never find a husband as good as him. He talked on and on. I could see he was suffering. I still loved him. I began to comfort him. We made it up.

And things got even more difficult. My little girl was often sick. He hardly even looked at her. She died. He didn't even come to the funeral. I lost my job. I spent my time getting involved in the organisation in my area. I found something useful to do. I could see he no longer loved me. But I hoped the bad times would pass and he would love me again.

I hoped until something happened that made me leave him. I came home one evening after a meeting. I was making tea. I heard the door open. There was a parcel that had come for him so I picked it up and went to give it to him. And like the last time I didn't understand at first. A tall slender woman was standing next to my husband. I saw he was sober and this made it worse. The woman looked

embarrassed. I put the parcel on the table, told him it was urgent and left the room.

As soon as I was alone I began to shake all over. I was afraid I would hear them so I lay with the blanket over my head. Now I had to realise he did not love me. Not even as a comrade or a sister. If he cared for me as a friend he would have been more thoughtful and not have brought his woman to our home. I felt such hatred towards that woman. I didn't sleep. Everything was quiet. And then I heard steps. The kitchen door was opened. I knew it was the girl. She didn't come back. I got out of bed and went into the kitchen.

She was sitting by the window, hunched up and crying her heart out. "Forgive me", she said, "I didn't know he wasn't living alone. I'm very upset about everything". This surprised me. I began to think she must be his friend, not a prostitute. I asked if she loved him. She looked surprised. She said, "We met for the first time yesterday. He promised to pay me well. Its the same to me as long as they pay well". She started to tell me her story. She had lost her job. Had no roof over her head. She had gone onto the street. She now had food, clothes and could send her mother money, she was still young. Only 19.





I listened to her and I began to feel sorry for the girl. I realised that if I had no husband I would be in exactly the same position as her. I now hated my husband. How could he take advantage of a woman's misfortunes? And he is supposed to be politically conscious and a responsible worker. Instead of helping a comrade he buys her. He buys her body for his own pleasure. I decided I could not stay and live with a man who acted like that. We talked for a long time. I made some coffee. But suddenly she was in a hurry to be gone. I asked if she got paid. She said she would not take the money.

I got dressed to see her on her way. I wanted her to take my last wage packet. All feeling for my husband died. And I am now walking around without money, work or a place to go. And I ask myself will I have to go on the streets like the girl?"

Here was a woman trying to be independent and trying to fight the old way of life. She went, but her look of hopelessness haunted me. It demanded an answer, it demanded action. It demanded struggle.



**A JOURNAL ABOUT WOMEN AND GENDER**

**AGENDA**

AGENDA is published by an editorial collective,  
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**(POWA)**

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**JOHANNESBURG**

**Rape Crisis**

Rape Crisis is a women's organisation. It advises women who have been raped or sexually abused. It also does research into why these things happen. If you would like to talk to us, phone Durban (031) 232323 or 295123. Or Cape Town (021) 479762

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# ***I AM PREGNANT!***

## ***WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CLINIC***



### **NAPULE'S STORY**

Napule has three children. She works in a home at Sandton, a rich area in Johannesburg. She lives in a room at the back. Napule told us the story of her pregnancy. She said "I went to a doctor for monthly-check ups when I was pregnant. I thought everything would be fine because I was taking care of myself. But my baby was born sick. And the doctor who saw my baby told me that this sickness could have been stopped while the baby was inside me. If the doctor had taken my blood and examined me inside my vagina he would have seen that I had an infection. He could have given me injections to make me and the baby better. When my baby was born he had to stay in hospital for many weeks. He is now better. But he is a weak baby. And not as big as my other babies." Napule felt angry. She said, "Why can't the doctors give us better care?"

### **WE NEED TO FIGHT FOR BETTER HEALTH CARE**

It is true that we need to have better health care. There are many problems in health. Very often there are too few clinics and very few doctors. Sometimes the clinics are too far away. Sometimes they are there but they are overcrowded. The time you get with the doctor is rushed. And you don't get a chance to ask questions. Sometimes we can't get off from work to go to the clinic. Most often we do not get proper care. All these are things we must fight for.

Napule was able to get to a doctor on her one day off. But Napule's doctor had only felt her stomach and given her injections at each visit. This could not tell the doctor that there was a sickness inside her that could be passed on to her baby. The doctor should have tested her blood. The doctor should have tested her urine. He should have



examined inside her vagina. He should have taken her blood pressure. Without doing all these things the doctor would not be able to tell if she and her baby were really well.

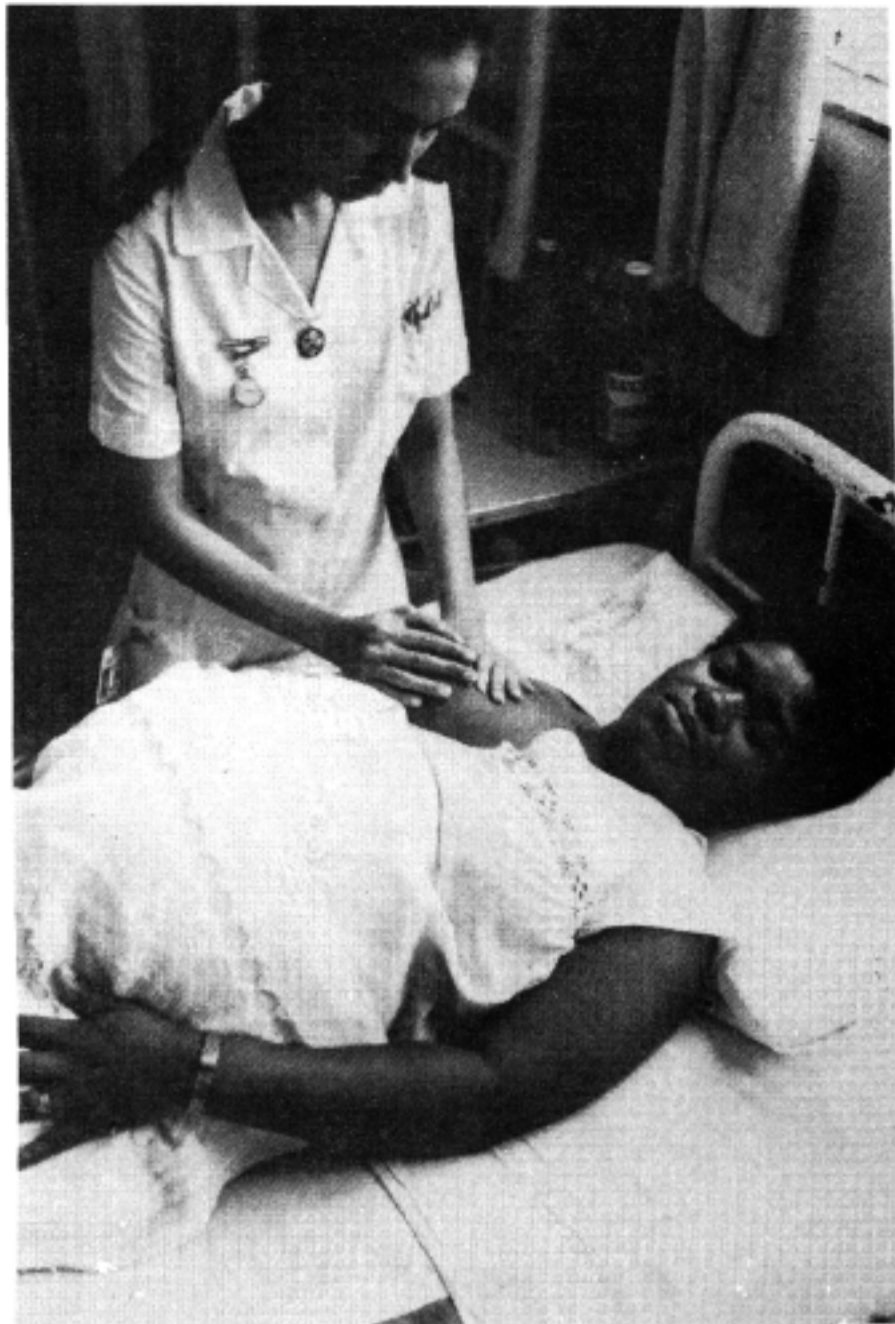
Napule did not know this. She said, "I thought I was doing the best for my baby by going to the doctor. if only I had known what to ask the doctor."

It is not easy to talk to most doctors. They don't expect you to ask questions and they usually treat you like children. But we have a right to understand the things that are happening in our bodies. And we have a right to make sure that we are getting proper treatment. We need proper ante natal care. This is the name given to the care needed in the time before a woman delivers her baby. If we know the things that should be done at pregnancy check-ups we can make sure that the doctors do these things. We can take a part in seeing to it that we get proper care. After all it is your body and the doctor is working for you.

It is important to go to the clinic as soon as you know you are pregnant. Then you can start getting care from early in your pregnancy. We will look at the most important things that should be done at the clinic to make sure that you and your baby are well while you are pregnant.

### **GENERAL EXAMINATION - checking your whole body**

At the first visit the doctor examines your body all over. She examines your breasts to make sure you will be able to breast feed your baby. She checks your weight. She checks that you are breathing well. And that your heart is beating properly. She checks that your teeth are alright. Teeth often become bad when you are pregnant. If the doctor finds a problem with any of these things she will send you to the hospital for more tests. The doctor will also ask when you had your last period and from this date and the examination she will tell you when your baby is likely to be born.



**Examining the breast**

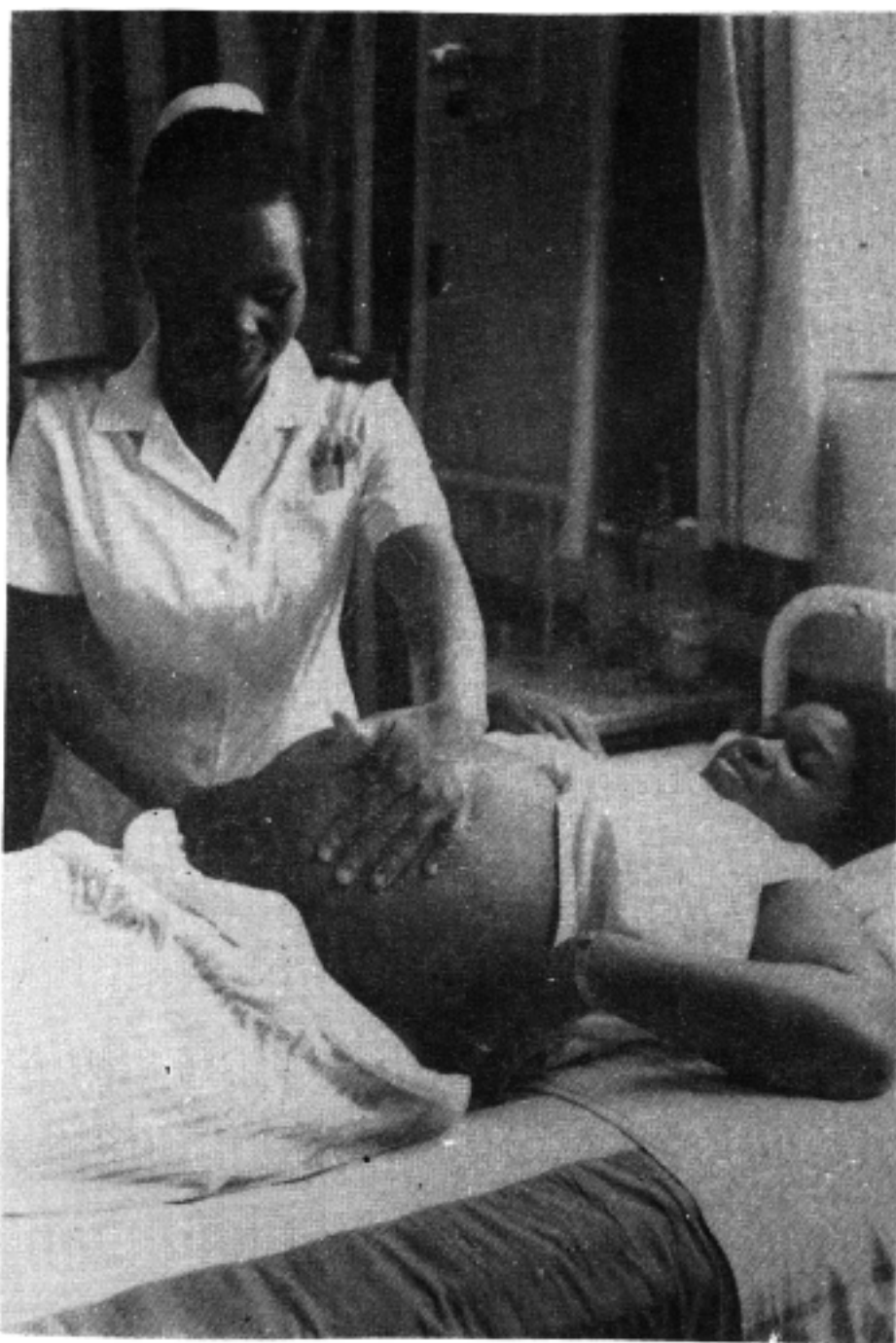
### **URINE TEST**

Everytime you come to the clinic your urine is tested. It is checked for infection which is common in pregnancy. It is checked for sugar. Some women get sugar diabetes when they are pregnant. This can make the baby very sick. The urine is checked for protein. If there is protein in your urine and if you have high blood pressure together this will be a sign of preeclampsia. The doctor will then put you on treatment.

### **BLOOD TESTS**

There are different blood groups. The clinic needs to know your blood group. And whether your blood is weak. The sickness that makes your blood weak is called anaemia. Anaemia makes a woman look very pale, feel very weak, and have trouble breathing when she walks. If you have anaemia, the doctor will ask you to take iron tablets to help. The blood is tested for syphilis. This sickness gets passed between men and women when they have sex. It makes both the mother and baby very sick. So if you have syphilis then the doctor will give you an injection which will get rid of it.





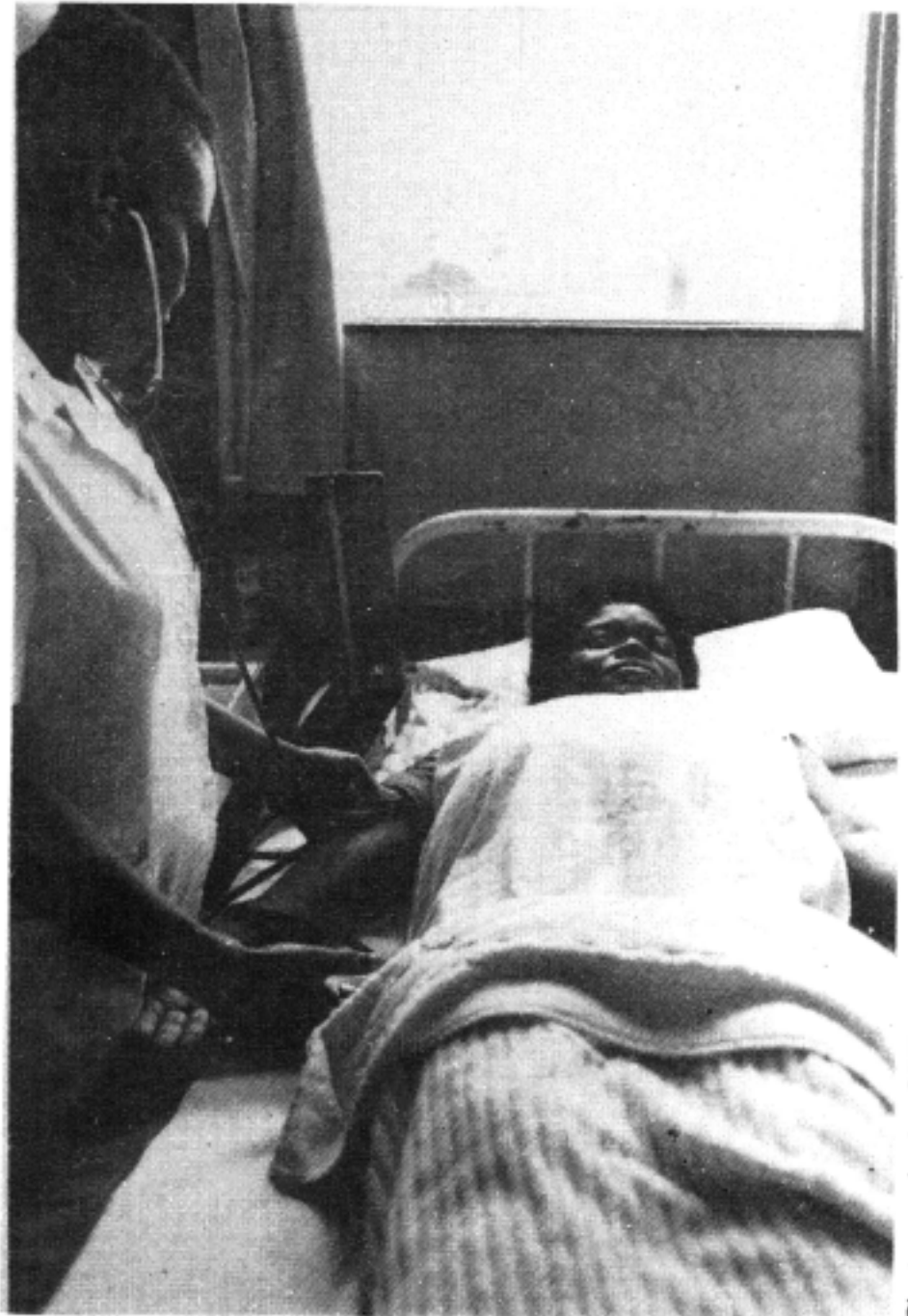
Examining the womb

### EXAMINING YOUR WOMB

On the first visit the doctor examines the inside of your vagina with a metal instrument called a speculum. She looks at the opening to your womb which is called the cervix. She scrapes the cervix with a wooden scraper and wipes this on a piece of glass. This is called a pap smear. This is done to find out if there is any cancer in the cervix.

If there is a bad discharge the doctor might take a swab from your vagina. A swab is a piece of cotton wool on a long wooden stick. The discharge sticks to the cotton wool. It is put onto a piece of glass, and it is sent for tests. The germs grow. If you have an infection the doctor knows what medicine to give you to make you better.

Then the size of your womb is measured. If you are early in the pregnancy the doctor feels the womb with one hand in the vagina and one hand on your tummy. If you are more than four months the doctor can feel the size of your womb just by feeling your tummy.



Taking blood pressure.

### BLOOD PRESSURE

Blood pressure measures how hard your blood is flowing through your veins. The doctor takes your blood pressure by tying a tight strap around your arm. She pumps it to make it tighter. And then she slowly lets it down. Some women have high blood pressure at the start of their pregnancy. They must take tablets all the time. Other women get high blood pressure at the end of their pregnancy. This is called preeclampsia and can be very dangerous for both mother and baby. If it is not treated the baby may die, and the mother can have bad fits.

These are the main things that need to be done while you are pregnant. If your doctor or clinic is not doing these things ask them why not. It is our right to lead healthy lives and to have healthy babies.



