

**“O**n my way back home, I sensed there was someone following me so I stopped to be sure who it was. A man grabbed me and covered my mouth with his hand. I could not make any alarm so he pushed me and I fell. He pulled my skirt, tore my panties and defiled me,” Kyolaba says in a shy and teary voice.

When Kyolaba reached home, she did not tell her mother that she had been defiled even when she had asked her why it took her so long to return home. She did not know how to break the news.

#### Afraid to disclose

“I continued going to school but did not tell anyone about my problem. After two months, I escorted my friend to her grandmother’s house. Her grandmother told me I was pregnant. I had missed my periods but I thought it was normal and when the old woman told me that, I did not know what it meant for one to be pregnant.”

A few days later, the old woman came to school and asked the head teacher to check all the girls in the upper primary classes for pregnancy. The school nurse called me and she squeezed (read palpated) my stomach and then told me I was pregnant and that I was going to give birth to a child.

In the head teacher’s office I was asked if I had had sex with anyone but I first denied because it because I was ashamed to have been defiled. So how else would you have got pregnant?” I was asked.

At 14, Grace Kyolaba, the first born and only girl in her family was defiled by a man whose face she says cannot recall clearly. One evening after school in November 2015, the Primary Seven pupil went to the market. That journey changed her life, writes **Beatrice Nakibuuka**.

## I was infected with HIV but living on

**“**The headteacher told me I could not continue being in school. I had become a disgrace in the community. People did not understand that I was just defiled.”

This was a furious question from my mother who had been called

to school. She spoke with anger and sadness. She had been raising us alone since my father left about eight years ago. I was in that school because a well-wisher offered to pay my school fees. My mother is a tailor. She had struggled to raise our school fees since the death of our father in 2006.

I do not have a clear image of the man who defiled me because it happened about 8pm and it was dark. I finally opened up about the incident but my mother was so hurt because I did not tell her. I wish I had trusted her instead of dodging whenever she asked if I had a problem.

The head teacher told me I could not continue being in school. I had become a disgrace in my community because people failed to understand that I was just defiled. I was judged for misbehaviour and playing with men so my mother thought it wise to take me away from home.

#### Accepting the fact

I was taken to a rehabilitation home for pregnant girls. On my first antenatal visit, my HIV tests gave negative results but the doctors asked for another test since the results were not conclusive.

“The doctors did a second test which showed I was negative but they still told me the results were not satisfying. I was then transferred to Wakisa ministries and the results there showed I was HIV

positive.”

“At some point I thought about committing suicide because I had lost all the hope. However, the people at Wakisa ministries consoled me. I felt encouraged when I was told I would give birth to an HIV negative baby,” she recalls.

I took my ARVs and in August 2016, I gave birth to a bouncing baby boy at Kawempe- Mulago hospital but I had to leave the rehabilitation home because it only takes on pregnant girls.”

#### Starting a new life

After giving birth, Kyolaba returned to her mother’s house in Entebbe but her mother took her to her grandmother’s home in Kayunga. While picking a refill of her ARVs in Seeta, she heard about an organisation called BRAC Uganda which supports young mothers.

“I went to their office in Seeta and shared my story. They were touched and wanted to help so I was asked to return after a week. I was given startup capital of Shs 500,000 and purchased shoes for women and children in January 2017.”

#### EXPERT VIEW

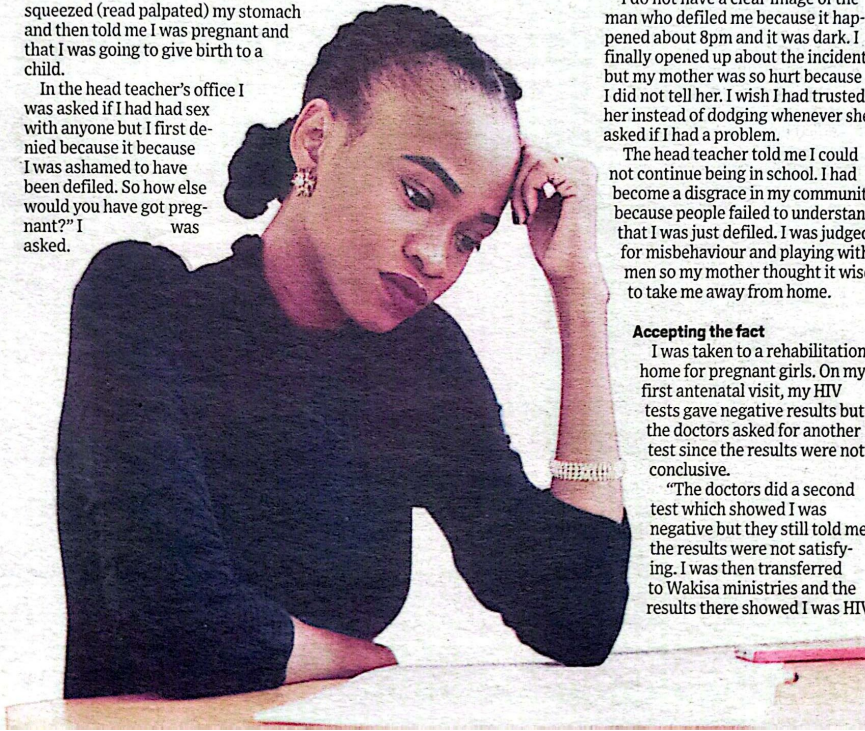
Young people, especially girls aged between 15 and 24, are disproportionately affected by HIV infection. Among adolescent girls: every single hour, two young women are getting infected with HIV in Uganda. The prevalence of HIV among adolescent girls stands at 9.1 percent, compared to the national prevalence rate of 7.3 percent. Currently, there are about 1.2 million Ugandans living with HIV. HIV remains a significant challenge to Uganda.

Its effects on the economy and society remains unacceptably high with up to 83,000 having contracted the HIV in 2016 (227 infections per day and nine infections per hour), while 28,000 died of HIV related illness in the same year (77 deaths per day). 60 per cent of the deaths are men due their poor health seeking behavior. Men remain most affected due to their poor seeking behavior who then transmit the HIV infections to young girls.

#### Sourced from:

-gicc.gov.co.ug  
Government Citizen Interaction Centre

From her shop in Seeta, Kyolaba is able to pay her rent and send money home for her child’s upkeep. She is also taking her medication and plans to go for adult education when she has saved enough money.



# 9.1%

THE PREVALENCE OF HIV AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Source: HIV Situation Report 2017, Uganda Aids Commission, UN.