

Joan's Story

Beaten and shunned because she had AIDS

A 27-year-old mother of three was beaten up, burned and left to die by her village people near Goroka town because she had AIDS.

Joan (not her real name), from Ketarobo village, was picked up by staff from the Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research two weeks ago after they were alerted by a friend of the women.

The woman was taken to Goroka hospital where she died a week later.

Phili Manove, a research officer with the IMR, was among four people who picked up Joan, including the IMR's HIV/AIDS sero-surveillance project coordinator Dr Lawrence Hammar and his wife. She said when Joan was found, she had fungus already growing in her mouth because she had not eaten for some time. Parts of her body were burnt and she had ulcers, obviously from beatings she had received from village men.

She was left under a shelter the people had put up near a stream away from the village.

'It was obvious that she had not eaten for days. She was extremely skinny and she was deteriorating because she had fungal growth in her mouth. Her house was burnt but she escaped being burnt,' she said.

She said the people refused to give a bucket to Dr Hammar and his team when they asked for one to wash Joan before taking her to the hospital. After Joan was brought to the hospital, her father came and told them that Joan must not be brought back to her village.

'When we took her to the hospital, the health workers were not helpful. Maybe because they thought that IMR was responsible. I don't know why but her sores were not treated although they gave her an injection. Maybe because she was deteriorating,' she said.

The villagers, through Joan's sister, asked later to compensate the IMR staff for caring for Joan, but Dr Hammar's team refused and asked only that Joan be buried in her village. The request was granted and her body will be buried in the village today.

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