



©ROSE SKELTON FOR TAR

DELIVERING LIFE

Midwife Hadjaratou Traore holds the truth dear, and advises her patients to do so too, even if it means living alone

I am a midwife. I do prenatal consultations, births, family planning, HIV prevention and tests, and post-natal consultations at a community health centre in Kati, Mali. I was trained by Marie Stopes International. Family planning used to be a taboo subject. The men would say that if the woman uses contraception it's because she wants to have a lot of boyfriends or be a prostitute. But now with adverts on the radio and TV, they know that it means having a child that is wanted. There are no more illegal abortions, or women who abandon or kill their children.

In one year, I may have six pregnant women who are HIV positive. They say they don't want to bring the husband here because the husband will leave them if they know she is pregnant. I tell them it is not the end of the world, we talk about the ways it can be transmitted, and that if she can't make the man wear a condom then the woman has to learn how to use the female condom. The woman often does not have any idea how she got sick. Maybe her husband is what we call a "running after little skirts" man. The woman has to be strong.

When the woman is in labour, I say: "Come on, come on, don't worry." I comfort her because at that moment, there is so much pain. I tell her: "Breathe, breathe, don't give up, push, push, you are so strong, it is going to come." I help her until the baby is in my arms. I feel so good at that moment, it really makes me happy. If you have once brought a baby into the world, you know the pain that the woman feels from the start of the work until the birth of the child. If you see a woman working like that, you feel the pain that you once felt.

When my son was three years old, the father told me that he had had a baby with another girl. He said he had wanted to tell me for a long time. Since he had lied, I said I could not marry him. It really hurt me, and I did not trust him any more. My parents didn't know what had happened and I couldn't tell them, I was so ashamed. He came to my father and said he wanted to marry me, and each time I said no. I can accept anything but lying. If you have something to say to me, say it, but don't lie.

Since then, I do not trust men. At my age, 40, I can't go out with men. If someone wants to marry me, a friend, I will get married, but it's impossible to have a sexual relationship like the one I had with that man. When I am working, I don't think about the fact that all my friends and my sisters are married. I tell myself, it will come with time. There are a lot of people who say I am beautiful, and ask why I can't find a husband, but I say, the day it comes, it will come. That is life. ●

Rose Skelton