

Many women fear intimidation when giving evidence against sex pests – but it doesn't have to be an ordeal

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT:

Speak out!

GONIWE ACCUSER'S NIGHTMARE: HERE'S EXPERT ADVICE ON HOW TO PREPARE FOR A HEARING

THE young woman at the hearing is being grilled relentlessly. "Who is the father of your child?" she's asked.

What does that have to do with this, she wants to know. That's private information. But her interrogator won't back down. "Who is your boyfriend?"

There are objections to the questions but the hearing panel insists she answers them.

"When did your father die?" the questioner asks.

She manages to mumble a reply. Then she bursts into tears and collapses.

It's difficult to believe the young woman being rushed to hospital is the complainant in the case – not the accused. And that the harsh interrogator is the man she has accused of sexual harassment.

It's an old story: a woman who dares bring a charge of sexual harassment against a man is humiliated all over again at the hearing.

WHEN Nomawele Njongo succeeded in bringing a South African political heavyweight to book after formally complaining of sexual harassment she became a beacon of hope to thousands of victims –

women especially – who'd been in a similar situation. The message was clear: justice will prevail if you have the courage to speak up.

But late last month she was subjected to the intrusive questioning described above at an ANC disciplinary hearing in Johannesburg.

The details of the case are widely known. Late last year Njongo was asked to assist at a party at the Cape Town home of the ANC's then parliamentary chief whip, Mbulelo Goniwe. When the guests had left he abused his position to try to get her into

bed, she later alleged in a formal complaint to the party.

In December the ANC's national disciplinary committee summarily fired Goniwe for sexual harassment and barred him from standing for public office or representing the party for the next three years.

But another ANC committee ruled there had been procedural errors in the disciplinary process and Goniwe was allowed a new hearing. This meant old wounds would be reopened.

In an exclusive interview with YOU in January Njongo was full of hope for her future.

She was planning on resuming her studies for a BCom degree through Unisa and bring her son to live with her in Cape Town.

"My first thought was, 'Thank God I'll be able to sleep again'," she said after the committee had upheld her complaint.

Little did she know what lay ahead. It's enough to make victims everywhere wonder if putting themselves through the ordeal is worth the effort.

But there is light at the end of the tunnel, Sonja Ensink (formerly Grobler) says. Two years ago the former secretary