

Voice against Violence: Unfolding the Realities of Change and Courage.

Violence and discrimination against girls and women has for long been one of the most persistent and haunting human rights violation that has followed us across generations. It comes in many forms - domestic abuse, sexual harassment/grooming, human trafficking, early and forced marriages, harmful traditional and cultural practices that no doubt degrades the females, emotional abuse and as well as inequality. For a long time, eras even, these gender-based violence has been excused as tradition, perpetuated by power imbalances and endured in silence. But today realities of change and courage are unfolding.

According to the UN (United Nations) one in three women world wide experience physical or sexual harassment in their lifetime; this violence occurs in homes, at work or even in public space where others may sometimes notice but choose to turn a blind eye. This is a harsh truth that we face everyday.

Many people think that violence is only when someone is hit or hurt physically, but it comes in many forms, forms that are often overlooked, because sometimes its the words spoken that cut deeper than a slap or a punch, like when a young girl still navigating her teenage year is forced into an early marriage, they are being told, though not directly, that their dreams and hopes for the future doesn't matter, or when a girl is raped she is being told that her consent is not needed, that her values are seen as nothing. All these scenarios may not leave a physical scar but they will leave one both emotionally and mentally. And thats why hope is birthed the moment one girl decides she will not stay silent.

Silence of the victims has always been the fuel of violence, from a girl afraid to speak out about abuse from her teachers or fellow students, to a woman bound in an abusive marriage and told to stay silent to protect reputation, and even to those who managed to survive but is silenced by the fear of shame. But when courage is introduced great things happen.



One such example is Malala Yousafzai, the youngest Nobel peace prize Laurette who once said, "I raise up my voice, not so I can be ^{heard} ~~heard~~, but so that those without a voice can be heard." She, at the age of 15 survived an assassination attempt by the Taliban. But she chose to have courage and speak out, and that simple act of bravery has inspired many not just herself. We have many other female activists that have made differences in our society like Michelle Obama, Chimamanda Adichie and many others.

The realities of change are becoming visible in our present time, Social media have become a platform where girls and women can share their stories, some utilize it to ask for help, small communities are beginning to recognise the issue of gender based violence and are creating safe spaces where girls can support each other, some are holding campaigns and creating educational programs where people come to share their stories and advice. All these little things lead up to great outcomes.

Yet, challenges still remain, things like, Female genital mutilation (FGM) or Female circumcision as some may know it, early marriages and many others are still being practiced, Patriarchy still denies females equal opportunities. Women are used as weapons in war or as negotiable goods.

And that's why the journey to change should not be left to the women and girls alone, Men and boys have a role to play and in my opinion not a small role. Research shows that gender based violence is carried out by the males and regardless no research is needed for us all to agree. They can start small like a father teaching his son to respect a woman and that raising his hand or even his voice on a woman is wrong. Or a male leader speaking out about abuse and encouraging the notion that women should be allowed education and leadership opportunities.

Women and girls are human beings we were created equally not with any impediments and I hope, that this journey to change is going to bring about the right change.

What gives me hope is that this generation is my generation is braver and louder than ever before. And that our voice against violence is more than just a ^{Protest} ~~process~~ it is a mission, a mission of success, of a future where girls can



dream freely and women can lead confidently with out any fear of repercussions.
Because as a girl "I matter. I matter equally. Not "if only", Not "as long as". I matter equally. Full stop." — Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche.

