

Finding Their Voice

I'm eleven years old and haven't started thinking about boys yet. So for me, it's hard to imagine that in some places in the world, girls my age are already married. In a recent school project, I learned about a girl in Yemen the same age as me, already married to a man. A man who is old enough to be her father.

Child marriage is common in Yemen. While I go to school, these girls, ages 8- 15, are married, and they have to fulfill the duties of a woman. They are pulled out of school, and most can't read. In fact, the women's literacy rate in Yemen is 30%! The girls have health problems, and their babies can be stunted. What makes it even worse is that these girls are beaten and abused, sometimes sexually. Some parents say that if the girls aren't married, they will be abducted and forced to marry. Because many girls' parents are in poverty, it seems like early marriage is the best choice, and they often take the first offer.

I read the story of Nujood Ali, a 9 year old Yemeni girl. Her father married her off quickly so she wouldn't be kidnapped and forced to marry, like his first two daughters. He thought he was protecting her, but her husband was extremely abusive, and she needed help. She was just a young girl, and all alone. But she was brave. When her husband finally let her visit her family, she ran away to a courthouse, and after stating her case they granted her a divorce, making Nujood the first divorced child bride in the Middle East. The story about this courageous girl is amazing and inspiring, but unfortunately, it doesn't always happen that way. If I were a reporter, I would travel to Yemen, a Middle

Eastern country on the Southwestern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, and expose more stories like these. If I could give the girls a voice, it would be the first step to helping.

One article in the New York Times said: "In Yemen, child marriage is common, but has rarely been exposed in public." After researching this more, I looked the Yemeni national newspaper, Saba News, where I noticed there weren't any articles about any child marriage and abuse. If no one knows what is happening to these young women, no one will be able to help them. My goal with this paper is to get people to think about these girls, and try to help the girls stand up for themselves, as Nujood did. Child marriage may sound old fashioned, but it's still happening in our modern world.

I feel connected to this situation, because I am these girls' age. I am a young girl, who's lucky to be in America, not in a country where child marriage is quite common, where it's something most girls go through, and something I couldn't possibly imagine happening to me. I want to help these girls because I feel so connected. I can't help thinking, *What if I lived in Yemen, and this was happening to my best friend? Or me?* I would be there for her, but these girls have no one, and I think if they just had someone to talk to, things might be better. I want to talk to them, want to give them a shoulder to lean on, and to say that everything will be fine. I don't want them to feel alone, because that is the worst possible feeling there is in the whole entire world.

After reading this article, I knew other girls were going through this abuse, and they were scared. Maybe they aren't brave enough, or maybe they don't have the chance, but I want to stop the abuse of young girls and help them stand up for themselves. I also think if we tried to lower the child marriage rate, less girls would find themselves in this frightening situation.

Girls in Yemen are marrying at a young age and being abused because of this. What most people don't realize is that this is something we can stop; this is a problem we can end. If more people know about this, I think together we can do something to help the young girls in Yemen find their voice.

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"Tiny Voices Defy Child Marriage in Yemen." The New York Times June 29, 2008. March 18, 2010

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