

Choosing my own life

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At times, one wonders what is needed for things to happen. We are left in the dark or hating ourselves as women. We are oppressed, made to feel useless or unworthy. Many cultures hold the minds of men, poisoning the minds of women, holding hostage the minds of children. As a woman I am not allowed to grow or choose my own life. I am not allowed to work or take contraception because it is wrong by my culture. I am not allowed to make male friends. One man asked me 'How can you be around so many men? You are shaming us! You behave like a white girl; you are forgetting your roots. Remember your place as a woman! Remember you are a woman, your place is in the kitchen, and making men happy, giving birth to children. Stop doing what is wrong and stick to the right thing in your culture.'

I remember as a young girl at the age of 10. There was a man in our street staying three houses away from my home. He believed that he and I were meant for each other. One day he came to me and gave me sweets, telling me how beautiful I am. One Friday after school, it was cloudy, I was tired and alone at home. He came to my house and knocked. I went to the door. He was standing there, smelling of alcohol and tobacco. He asked if anyone was at home, I said No. he asked where everyone was. I said my mother went to town with my little sister. My father is at work and my cousin went to the shop to buy bread so we can eat. He said I came to check on my wife. I replied 'I am going to tell my dad what you said'. He then begged me not to say to anyone and left.

Those words stuck in my mind. I stopped playing with other kids on the street. I told my mother. She explained that men see me as

a woman. Many men in the township think sleeping with a virgin will cure them of HIV or make them younger. I asked my mother why my friends are not seen as women too. My mother said it is because you are a big girl and your body is different from your friends. That made me hate the way I looked. I did not want to be a big (fat) girl. I wanted to be skinny like my friends. That made me take a different turn. I stopped eating as I wanted to be slender like my friends. I did not love myself anymore. I did not see myself as beautiful anymore. I wanted what other kids had. I neglected myself.

I started to be a tomboy, dressing like a boy as that would take attention away from my body. I played with boys, wanted to be a boy because boys have big bodies and nobody has problems with their bodies.

I am a woman and I am beautiful. You may not like the way I look, I may not be the IT girl. I may not have the perfect body but I am a woman and I am beautiful. I may not fit in the list of pretty girls, I may have big eyes or a small nose. That does not identify me. I may not appear in magazines or look like those catwalk ladies. But I am a woman and beautiful.

