



SHAMED AND BLAMED: STORIES OF PREGNANT GIRLS IN SIERRA LEONE¹

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ISA

"I came to Freetown when I found out I was pregnant. When I heard I was pregnant I did not feel good. The boy is 19 years old and from the same village. I came with my man to town, but now I am staying with my aunt. I am 6 months pregnant. My dad died, so my uncle was paying for my school. The teachers did not allow me to go to school. My uncle took my bag and books and gave them to my sister. I feel ashamed but I would attend school now if I could go. And I will go back to school after birth."



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KHADI

16 year old girl. "When I found out that I was pregnant I felt bad because I am the eldest daughter and I was the hope of my mother because I was very good at school. I have the belief and the hope to be a lawyer"

¹ These testimonies are included in the Amnesty International's report *SHAMED AND BLAMED: Pregnant girls' rights at risk in Sierra Leone* (AFR 51/2695/2015). They were obtained during the interviews conducted by Amnesty International in Sierra Leone in June 2015.



ADAMA

I live with my uncle. I did stay with an aunt, and did housework and chores. Then my mum came and took me and I finally went to school. I had not started my periods yet when I got pregnant. A man forced me to have sex, he took me in a room and closed the door. I tried to resist but he forced me. I think I am about 5 months pregnant. I saw a nurse where I live and asked her to see me, but I did not have money and my uncle did not do anything. The man has left the area.”

When asked if she knew if she could go to school now or not, Adama said “I heard about a big man who said pregnant girls could not go to school.”

Adama’s hopes and dreams for the future: “I want to be a lawyer and to be able to talk for my friends.”



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ELIANE

Eliane, 16 year old mother: “When I was pregnant I felt bad because my sister could take exams and go to school, while I had to stay home. Pregnant girls should go to school and be brave

CHRISTIANA’S STORY – “I DID NOT KNOW WHAT SEX WAS”

“I was 12 years old when I got pregnant. The boy is 19 years old. I met him when fetching water. He gave me money and helped me. I did not know what sex was. I have not learnt about sex in school. I did not use protection. When I found out I was pregnant I was shocked.

My mum drove me from the house and I went to stay with my aunt. My mum told me aunt to drive me from the house and I went to the street until my uncle begged my mum to allow me back in the house. The baby is 9 months old. I am just at home looking after the child.

I would tell the President to help me go back to school.”



AMINATA'S EXPERIENCE

Aminata, 13 years old.

“My mum does not give me money to go to school. My mum does not have any money. I ended up with a boy aged older than 17 years. I got pregnant and I had to have the baby. The boys' mother used to swear at me, she said her son was not the father and that she hoped I would die in childbirth. We went to the police station with the baby. Now I live with my parents. I did not know how you got pregnant, so when I felt ill and one of my aunties who is nurse told me I was shocked. For the first three months I stayed on at school, then I left, my fellow pupils started talking.”

Aminata's hopes and dreams: “I would like to work for people and help. I would like to be a lawyer maybe?”

“THEY TOUCHED OUR BREASTS AND STOMACH TO SEE IF WE WERE PREGNANT”

Amnesty International interviewed an 18 year old girl who confirmed that she and her fellow pupils were physically inspected by teachers and some subjected to pregnancy tests when she went to school to get her attendance slip to sit the BECE exams in late March 2015.

“We had to register and queue to get an attendance slip for the exams. The female teachers told all the girls we would be searched as pregnant girls are not allowed to sit exams. We were made to line up and we were checked. They touched our breasts and stomach to see if we were pregnant. Some girls were made to take urine tests. The teacher was wearing gloves when she was checking us, but only used one pair of gloves throughout the process which is dangerous during Ebola times. I felt really embarrassed when this happened to me. Many girls left as they were scared the teachers would find out they are pregnant. About 12 pregnant girls did not sit their exams. This policy is bad as many girls may not sit exams.

I heard that this happened at other schools as well – at schools and not the examination centres. The teachers told us the government told them to do this checking. They are ashamed to see pregnant girls go to school. The teachers talked to the students not to say anything and now we are frightened to speak about what happened.”

OTHER GIRLS' EXPERIENCES

- “If you are pregnant, it is not the end of your life. I was pregnant when school re-opened. I was not allowed to go. If I had been allowed, I would have gone.”
- “Around six girls we know who were pregnant, decided not to go to school from their own choice. Some want to come but the parents say no, they will not pay for them again – so they decide to get married. After they give birth, they do not want to go back. They are afraid, ashamed, some of their friends will laugh at them. Some feel that the teachers will not allow them again.”
- “I was pregnant and I was not allowed to go to school. It was unfair. They didn't allowed me to have a future. If I had been back I would have not listened to any provocation from my peers, because it is about my future.”