

Voices on Violence

Economic Violence

“Can you imagine how rich I would be even if I were paid a few shillings for all the work I do right now?” Rebecca asked her friend. “I wake up early and have to sweep the compound and then fetch water and then cook porridge for everyone. When I come back from school, I have to wash clothes, pound cassava, help with cooking supper and then wash plates. I am so tired by the time I go to sleep.”

“Stop dreaming,” her friend said, shaking her as if she was asleep. “Instead of payment, my uncle says he will refuse to pay for my uniform and shoes if he thinks I am not behaving well. Since my mother died, he has taken over our house and all the property and says it is his now. Children, he says, don’t know anything about money so now that my parents are dead, it’s all his.”

“My father says,” Rebecca added, “I will fetch a good bride-price when the right man comes along, and it will make him a rich man. But until then I should work hard at home to contribute towards the family.”

“Do you think children should have to work so hard to have their basic needs provided,” her friend asked? Rebecca thought about it for a while than said, “everyone should make a contribution to their family according to their ability, but children are sometimes asked to contribute too much. I wish I could tell him that I am so tired and can’t concentrate at school and all the work hurts my body. My back hurts all the time from carrying heavy loads or my young sister.”

“Why do you think adults make children work so hard?” her friend asked her. Rebecca thought about it for a while and then said, “Only they can answer that. Maybe it’s because they think children are an investment, not real human beings. Maybe they do it because they can. After all, who is going to stop them?”

In a study completed recently, almost 30 percent of the children consulted said they experience economic violence at least once a week. More than one in three children said that they had been denied food or basic need as a form of punishment and almost 50 percent said they were overworked in their family.

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