

PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Third Place Winner

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Where citizens do not have fundamental rights, resources to care for physical needs, or free will, there is no peace. This formula is vital to maintaining our inherent dignity as human beings. History has repeatedly proven that a violation of these rights results in turmoil, loss of lives, and oppression. History has also shown that the group most at risk of violation makes up half of the human population- women. When half of the world population is robbed of these rights, the world cannot have peace.

Education is perhaps the most powerful tool in achieving peace. It is a worthwhile investment that transforms the individual. It provides empowerment and a lifetime of opportunities. It is an undeniable right. Yet there is an enduring bias against girls receiving an education. In South and West Asia, girls make up two thirds of the school-age children who are out of school. In many cultures, girls are raised to believe that their sole purpose is to keep a home and raise children. Consequentially, they are kept at home their whole lives. This allows for a cycle of ignorance. If knowledge is power, then ignorance is helplessness. A generation of helpless women cannot create or help to maintain peace.

Bodily afflictions do not allow for peace of the mind or spirit. A major health issue for women is maternal mortality. In many areas of the world, death of the mother is a common risk of childbirth. The World Health Organization estimated that 536,000 women died during pregnancy or childbirth in 2005. This statistic correlates to one woman dying every one hour. In giving a life, a woman risks her own. The overwhelming majority of these deaths occur in poor countries, where maternal health is rarely a priority. There is no peace when the sanctity of human life is violated by the placing of one life above another.

Perhaps the most enduring and shameful violation of free will is the outright oppression of women in many developing countries. Girls in Thailand as young as twelve years old can be sold into sex slavery by their parents, and they can remain unwilling prostitutes until they die of AIDS. Men can rape women in South Africa and only be charged with "indecent assault", because male rape does not exist in South African law. Girls in India can be forced to marry much older men, and they can be physically and emotionally damaged in becoming wives and mothers too soon. These girls and women do not have peace because they do not have free will.

Those directly affected by these injustices cannot have peace, and those not directly affected should not have peace of conscience. The wrongs that are inflicted on women cannot remain solely a women's issue. Girls' education, maternal health, and respect of free will- these are causes that require the unity and attentiveness of both men and women. Until half of our population is liberated from these violations of human dignity, we cannot have peace.