

# HE(A)R ME

## Poetry Anthology of Women Survivors

**Presented by YouthRISE Nigeria**  
**Edited by Adeolu Adebisi**

 **YOUTHRISE**  
NIGERIA



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Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women – Maya Angelou

## Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

### YouthRISE Nigeria

This anthology seeks to amplify the quietened and unsilence the silenced voices of many young women and girls who have had to endure the harsh realities of gender based violence in our society. We hope this will ensure inclusion of all voices in the gender reform advocacy and help make the world liveable for everyone including women and girls who use drugs.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has become a development challenge that is influenced by a number of factors within the society. GBV does not affect only the victim but has economic and health implications on the larger society. It deepens inequality faced by adolescent girls and young women and pushes them to the fringes of marginalization, further impoverishing them. Unfortunately, the voices of young women, especially those who use drugs and other marginalized groups such as those living with HIV, are rarely heard even in the broader gender advocacy space. For women in Africa, gender-based violence against those who use drugs has overtly become a norm, considering the punitive laws and repressive policies with little or no response in terms of safety, and access to justice for the victims.

The situation is worse for young women who use drugs as they are at the lowest part of the gender power dynamics and due to their criminalized behaviours which drive them underground, limit their access to care and other support services. As such, their GBV experiences are normalized and often unheard or unreported.

It is to this end, that YouthRISE Nigeria decided to create an anthology as part of our broader drug policy reform and gender equality advocacy project. A call was put out in the public domain and within the community of women who use drugs and those living with HIV for submissions, collectively creating the anthology you are about to read. By providing a platform of expression for young women and individuals who are willing to speak out about this social injustice, we strengthen our community and its individuals.

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# SECTION I

She Speaks



## A Woman of Value

C.O

I am the mother of the world

I am not broken by the responsibilities placed on me

I wake up when others are still in bed

Even in my dream I plan to ensure good welfare of people around me.

I am not a weak vessel.

I am never moved by the nomenclature given to me rather become my source of strength

The world will not be without my existence.

I foresee what the future looks like

I am a seer

I nurture both young and old.

I should be appreciated by all and never to be abused; not molested even if I am unconscious, nor undignified even if my body is ailing.

My worth is far above rubies.

I am beautifully made

I am a woman of value.



Because I Am a Lady!

M.I

*Because I am a lady!  
Expressing my feelings make me loose  
I have no right to my body  
It belongs to them*

*Because I am a lady!  
I am fearful for my girl child  
Unjust is the new norm  
in communities and schools*

*Because I am a lady!  
I'll continue to campaign against injustice  
Until the silence is broken,  
And the world is safer*

*My body is my right!  
Stop violence against women!*

Dear Beautiful Lady

I.O

Without a single clue of what to expect  
I came into this world  
If only my creator gave room to suspect  
I would take a different turn

The chance to choose my fate  
To say YES to a decent date  
The courage to say NO,  
To that man whose heart was taught to hate

Hate for the right to be me  
Despise for the desire to be free  
Not my face! Not my self-esteem! It hurts!  
The scars, the shame you caused

With these experiences up my sleeves  
I am in this world  
To lend my voice to the voiceless  
And now won't you also?

Her

B.O

Pills to help the pain  
Makeup to cover the bruises  
Flowing dresses to hide the shame  
The dark marks, a constant reminder

Keeping silent daily  
Praying, for an ending  
Hoping a society that is caring  
And not the victim to blame

Slap after slap  
Kids are watching  
His fists always doing the talking  
Her voice not deserving to be heard

A call to the family in search of solace  
“What did you do to him?” they said  
Now not hurting his feelings is the concern  
Submit to him no matter what

A monster’s ego being praised never backs down  
Day after day she remains a punching bag  
With a deaf society and an uncaring family  
Her shame her pain all alone

Alas! Alas! Alas!

A day with blood flowing everywhere

Life was going and then finally gone

She's gone; the monster moves on



## I Am a Woman

J.E

I choose to be strong so that I can love,  
I choose to be strong so that I can nurture,  
I choose to be strong so that I can cherish,  
I choose to be strong so that I can help protect others who are more vulnerable  
I choose to be strong so I can stand to defend other women at all times  
I choose to be strong in mind so that I can forgive more, understand more and not be  
defined by my mistakes  
I am stronger in spirit so that I can be a wall of fire around other women  
Be a voice against molestation  
I am a woman not a sex object.  
Men! Women are HUMAN  
Respect our rights.

# SECTION II

## Dismantling Bricks



## A Prison Called Home

A.A

My safe place used to be called home,  
Home was love, home was peace  
My Uncle, My Abuser  
They say silence speaks louder, but silence is becoming my death  
My heart is full of pain but with no strength to speak

My father: Save the famiy's name  
My mother: Can't stand the wraths of shame  
My priest: Forgive

No one is listening  
My heart is bleeding  
My strength is fading  
My home, my prison

Home.

M. S

And she asked,

Where is home,

A place where my rights as a young woman is not appreciated?

A place where I lose my dignity as a human because I am a woman?

Where is home?

What is home?

It does not exist...



# SECTION III

Answer Her



## Clear Voice > Deep Voice

A.F

My voice is Clear  
Yours is deep  
Mine... Soft tone and sweet  
Calm the cries of babies  
Sing praises of love when given

Mine... Clear! Yes Clearer  
When allowed to speak as its peak  
Not shut down by tradition or audition  
Silenced by norms or tongues  
Condemned by “this is not your father’s house”  
Threatened by “reduce your confidence else you remain lonely”

Mine... Clear! Yes the clearest  
Separate cowards from creators  
Isolate affection from distraction  
Not for the villains  
Voice that builds, views mightiness  
Above the ordinary

My voice... Shout from here to the whole world  
Sings sonorously to the Lord  
My voice fights for...  
I that’s pretty and beautiful

YOU whose education should not be neglected

HER with a body to be pampered

US lives not to be violated

## A Moment of Silence

E.O

He did it again!

He promised that last time was the last time,

But here you are, his hands wrapped around your neck;

Face painted, Eyes Black.

You keep searching for someone who never existed;

The person who promised to love and protect you.

Maybe you should walk away;

Or maybe things would get better.

You are afraid to speak;

To go out on stage and tell your truth.

You do not want to be labelled a victim;

The poster girl for domestic violence,

So you silence yourself.

Your hope slowly departing;

The fear never leaving your mind;

He had taken everything.

You have been taught to suppress your feelings;

That a man must put up with more to make his family happy;

They don't get it;

They don't understand what it feels like to be trapped;

To be labelled useless, weak, "not man enough";

To be hit and verbally abused over and over again;



To feel your light slowly go out every time she “loses her temper” until you are left with nothing but pitch black and depression;

To feel so helpless.

You cannot speak out;

No one would believe that a woman hits a man;

You do not want to become a statistic;

To be the man who could not defend himself against a woman;

To be the object of ridicule,

So you silence yourself.

Afterall, she said she’s sorry.

To anyone who has experienced gender-based violence,

I write for you.

Break the silence.

Let your words echo through the room and fill the empty space.

Rip the silence part;

Tear down stereotypes and victim-blaming.

No longer should you suffer in silence.

I write for those who struggle to find themselves;

You are the author of your story;

Unwrap the ugly,

There is beauty hidden deep inside.

You can get through this.

You can be you again.

A moment of silence for those who got out but are six feet under.

## I Believe You

O.G.O

She told me her story  
Of how it started  
And never ended

She told him her story  
On those starless nights  
Lurking quickly into years of gloom

Oh!  
How the owl mourned her story  
Oh!  
How the wind...

She told me her story  
One of brokenness  
That sought healing  
One of pain  
That sought redemption

...

..

.

I told him my story

With starry eyes  
And salty tears

Shaking body  
Shaken soul  
I shared my story

He said

I BELIEVE YOU

PS: To everyone broken out there  
Dearest.

HARD as it may seem

I BELIEVE YOU!

## The Admonition

P.A

Dear son, do not trail same path, you should do better,  
Be brave, be bold, be strong but not a wife beater,  
Treat your sisters and wife with love and care,  
Learn to talk things through, do not act on your temper.

Do not repeat my mistakes dear daughter,  
Speak up! Do not fret, do not fidget, do not cower,  
The first time should be the last, it should never go further.

Dear family and friends, help me heal!  
Do not stigmatise me, do not push me away, try to understand how I feel,  
When I speak up do not shut me up, I am being violated and these tales are real.

Today I take my last breath on my dying bed,  
I have chosen to speak up so I can be heard,  
Take my words and take heed.

## Why K.J.O

They look but not see  
Covered by the lies, norms, harmful traditions, and culture they grow with  
They see sex slaves and baby factories no significance  
Alas! Without me they would never be.  
They take me for granted, limiting my possibilities  
I give life and yet they joy in taking mine.

Why?  
Why take advantage of me in my low state?  
Why can't I walk and not be afraid of what people might say or do to me?  
Why do I need your approval to speak and be heard?  
Why can't I wear what I want without judgement when I want without people judging me?

Why?  
Why can't I stand and speak in public without prejudice?  
Why belittle me, down throd me because you feel more powerful, because you are a man?  
Why do I always have to prove myself to be accepted?  
Why can't I be my own man in the spelling of WOmAn I am more than a man?

Why?  
Why can't I walk the street free, without fear of being harassed or harmed?  
Why can't you love me for me, respect me, and accept me?  
Why do you define me?

Why can't we have a world where women are not stereotyped, silenced, and vulnerable?

I am me

I am bold, I am creative, I am excellent

I am woman, I am change, I am equality, I am cradle.



### ABOUT YOUTHRISE NIGERIA

YouthRISE Nigeria envisions a society where the health, human rights, and development of every young person in Nigeria is protected and promoted.

YouthRISE Nigeria is an initiative with a mission to promote evidence-based policy and interventions with the meaningful involvement of young people and marginalized communities.

Visit the YouthRISE Nigeria website: [www.youthriseng.org](http://www.youthriseng.org)

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