

Mariama's Story

Mariama was 11 or 12 years old when she was arrested for murder. This began a series of egregious breaches of her human rights and, specifically, her rights as a child. She was arrested for the murder of a 25-year old woman married to an older man that was having a relationship with Mariama.

Mariama was pursued and sexually abused as a child by this man, forty years her elder, in the village where she regularly visited her mother. Mariama repeatedly refused his advances, telling him she was still a schoolchild. He told her that he was separated from his wife. When Mariama challenged him on this he bought her gifts and made arrangements to spend the night with her.

On the day of the incident, Mariama visited the village at her mother's request to collect provisions.

The man's wife approached Mariama and began to verbally abuse her. The man failed to placate his wife and left, leaving Mariama at the mercy of his angry wife. She threatened Mariama that someone would go to the grave that day and continued with crude verbal abuse, leading to both of them being summoned by the village chief. The wife then physically attacked Mariama and produced a knife, with Mariama having to fight for her life. According to Mariama, in the struggle, the woman turned violently into the knife which Mariama had grabbed after it fell to the ground. The wife later died from her wound.





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Mariama's involvement in the incident was clearly as a child victim in an adult world. Had she survived, the deceased should have been prosecuted for her violent attack and the older man should have been arrested and prosecuted for his relationship with a child. Mariama on the other hand, has felt the full force of the law.

It took 2 years, with repeated appearances before the High Court, for Mariama to be found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 25 years.

Mariama's mother died whilst she was in detention, a huge and painful loss for any child to suffer alone. AdvocAid's social worker built a strong relationship with Mariama through weekly visits, providing counselling and supporting her to continue her education. She has three younger brothers who she often worried about due to both parents being dead, especially the youngest. She was sustained by her profound desire to continue her education and fulfil her ambition to become a lawyer, to serve those suffering injustice. Whilst in detention, she passed both her national school exams, achieving above the national average.

AdvocAid's legal team continued to pursue her case. Finally, after four years in detention, Mariama was released after receiving a Presidential Pardon. As part of our post-prison support, AdvocAid was able to trace members of Mariama's family. After conducting monitoring visits to her new home, AdvocAid were delighted to be able to see Mariama start a new phase in her life. We will continue to walk by Mariama's side and support her dream to become a lawyer to advocate for other women facing injustice in Sierra Leone.