

Wives

I have had a difficult life, very difficult. When I was a young girl my parents arranged my marriage. My husband was a tailor and he was a very nice person. He behaved very well and I lived with him for ten years. But his family was not like him. It was my fate that I could not become a mother. His family punished me for this.

"How long will you stay in our house without having a child?" Without a child I was a servant and slave in the house of my in-laws. I wish that my husband's family had respected me because I was his wife, but they did not. I served them and helped them all the time, but nobody cared.

In order to stay in my own house with them I said to myself, "I have to obey." I washed their clothes, washed the dishes, and did everybody's cleaning just to pass my days and nights, just to exist. For ten years I lived like this.

My husband had a good relationship with me. He told me, "I don't need a child. You are a very good wife and you are nice to my family and tolerate them. It is okay for me not to have a child."

But fate would again make me suffer; one day on his way back home from work he was killed in a car accident. I no longer would have him in my life.

After my husband's sudden death, there was no reason to stay with my in-laws, but I had nowhere else to go. My parents were dead and I had no brothers to help me. My brother had gone to Iran to search for a better fortune, and we had not heard word of him since. We did not know if he lived or died. My one sister had died after I was married, leaving me with no close relatives at all. I lived with my in-laws for five years more. Every day I tolerated hardships and every day I had a warning and they would ask me why I still stayed there.

One day my brother-in-law told me that I would have to leave the house now. It was evening and I didn't know what to do. Crying, I left and stayed one night with a friend. But I couldn't live there. I had a relative in Mazar, so I called him and told him that I was homeless. I had nothing but the clothes that covered my body. My friend paid for my trip to go to Mazar, and now I live with my relative as a servant. I wash the clothes, cook, and clean. I live, but my life passes with such difficulty. I have no one close, no one who cares for me.

My relative has sent me to Kabul because I am sick. I have come to Kabul because of my high blood pressure and because of depression. I am depressed because of the life I have led and what I have suffered.

In Kabul they say that widows receive a lot of help. This may be true, but I have been here a week and I still need help. But they have bought me new clothes and I have

Not everybody's opportunity arranged

enough food. I am happy here, but I will have to go back to Mazar. My relative called me and asked me if I will come or not because he will find another servant if I don't. I will go back. I wish I had a son or a daughter to help me today. I wish I had a family to think about me. Everybody in this world has someone to take care of her, but I don't have anyone. Maybe I didn't deserve it. I pray to God and ask God to help me. I don't ask God to kill me and I don't kill myself because I know it is not right.

You asked me to tell you about my life. I don't call it "problems." I tolerate it. It is my fate.

By Shakila

Education

Mariam, age 25

I graduated in economics at a university in Herat even though my parents did not want me to continue beyond high school. They thought girls should get married after high school, not get a higher education.

I cried every day before registration for the university entrance exams. I tried to register myself but my parents locked me in a room. When my brothers came home and asked what had happened to me, my father said, "Mariam is locked in the house until registration for the entrance exams is closed."

"Why?" my brothers asked.

"Because she is a girl," my father said. "Girls should not study at the university." My brothers defended my rights. "It doesn't matter if you are a man or a woman," they said. My father seemed persuaded but my problems were not yet solved. My parents said I must also help support the family; they hoped I would be too tired to go to university. But I learned to sew clothes and every day after classes I sewed for other people to earn money.

Now I have finished my education, I have a good job at an NGO, and I have a good life, but women in Afghanistan still suffer to get an education. They have to wear a burqa to get to the university or to work. Many girls are banned from all education; some can study only until grade six. In places where there are security problems, women can be kidnapped if they go to school.

Many organizations claim to defend women's rights in Afghanistan, but often their efforts are only symbolic. They should help families who cannot afford to send girls to school and should help graduates find jobs. When there are fewer economic problems, there will be less family violence.

Business

Rahima is from a poor family in Herat Province. When she was two years old she became **unable** to lift one of her feet. She has seven sisters, two brothers, and kind parents.

Rahima, who is twenty-two, tells a visitor: "Disability is not an **obstacle** in my life; I will **reach** my entire wish **despite** my disability."

Her mother, Malalai, said she does not know what caused her daughter's foot problem. "I did not have her vaccinated when she was a baby because there was no **opportunity** to do that. When she first became **unable to walk**, I took her to some local women who claimed that they knew how to fix some health problems. But every day her foot became worse."

So Rahima grew up with a **disabled** foot. She was not able to walk like **other** girls, but she attended **school** up to eighth grade. She also attended sewing classes put on by international agencies in Farah and learned how to sew clothes. She became a tailor. Her life **changed** when Red Crescent provided an **opportunity** for treatment of her foot. Her foot is now straighter, but she still requires medication and cannot walk normally. "I was very **glad** and I felt like I was in the sky," she said.

Every day Rahima visits with about six other women to get orders for clothes. Everyone wants her to make their clothes.

"I make clothes for 100 Afs (\$2 US) and each day I can make \$10 US. I can support my family and pay for my own needs. I do not need to ask for money from anyone." She is **optimistic** for the future of Afghanistan. She thinks the coming elections are **important** and she plans to vote. She hopes that the new government of Afghanistan will pay more attention to the disabled people and a secure environment will be provided for them.

By Rahima

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My fate locked
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Business

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MY FATE:
EDUCATION? NO
SUFFERING? ALWAYS

Not a
mother
locked in
Problems

I TOLERATE
SUFFERING TO
FOLLOW FATE

Paula M. M.

Business

Homeless Servant

banned

to

defend

RIGHTS