



## Rescuing Masai Girls From Early Marriage

This is the VOA Special English Education Report.

Priscilla Nangurai of Kajiado, Kenya, retired as a teacher in two thousand five. Today, at the age of sixty-two, she could be living a quiet life in retirement. Instead, she leads an organization at her home called GRACE -- the Girls' Rights, Attention, Care and Rescue Center. She tries to rescue Masai girls from early marriage and make sure they get an education.

She has rescued more than seven hundred girls since nineteen eighty-six. She now has fifteen girls at her center, and she is building a dormitory to house up to eighty girls.

In the traditional culture of the Masai people, fathers often promise their young daughters in marriage to older men. Most girls are between the ages of twelve and fourteen, with some even younger. Their bodies are not ready for sex and childbirth. But that is not the only problem. Most of them must also leave school.

Priscilla Nangurai's older sister was forced into marriage at a young age, but demanded that Priscilla receive an education. She says the problem begins when a girl gets "booked" when she is very young, or not even born yet.

PRISCILLA NANGURAI: "Booking is when a parent or a man wants to marry from a certain family. So he can go to the family, and if there are little girls there, he will book. If one of the wives is expectant, he will say, 'I want something from this womb.' And he's allowed to do that."

A fourteen-year-old girl named Roseline has been at the rescue center since two thousand eight. At the age of four she was booked to a man who she thinks was about sixty to seventy years old.

ROSELINE: "Yes, I was booked. But when I knew the person that they booked me, I just talked to Ms. Nangurai. I told her the whole story."

Masai culture calls for the man who wants to marry a girl to start paying the girl's father once the booking has been made. Traditionally the payment is made with cows, but today money can also be exchanged.

When the marriage will soon take place, the girl must undergo a custom that some call female circumcision. Others denounce this practice followed in Masai and other cultures as female genital mutilation.

A thirteen-year-old girl also named Priscilla was brought to the center at the age of five. Her mother wanted her to be educated. The girl says she is thankful especially for health reasons that she did not have her sex organs cut. She worries that she could have gotten AIDS from unclean tools.

PRISCILLA: "They don't circumcise one person with one razor blade. Maybe when we are two girls, they can use this one to the first girl and then they use it again to another one. So that's why I don't want that."

And that's the VOA Special English Education Report. Our website now has a weekly Words in the News Quiz. Test your vocabulary at [voaspecialenglish.com](http://voaspecialenglish.com). I'm Jim Tedder.

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