

What a child soldier's experience of war was

When I first met Haji he seemed like any young shy boy. I could not see any of the pain or suffering he said he had to endure. Haji is a 14 year old boy from the village called Sumbuya. Haji was 12 when his village was attacked, he eventually became a child soldier for the army when he was 13. He was brought here to Freetown for rehabilitation. He has since made progress and it has been eight months since he was first brought here and feels comfortable enough to speak on his past. He describes his village being attacked by saying "when they first attacks I was walking around the market. The rebels came out firing into the crowds and I looked for my family, but when I could not see them I had to run. The only sounds around were the screams of people dying, gunshots, and explosions. I did not care about the sounds, the only thing on my mind was run, run, run, i need to find my family. I figured they would be at the bushes, but when I got there they were not. I turned around to see my village on fire and people being killed all over. The rebels were about to shoot at me when my older brothers friend Kemi pulled me down and we hid in the bushes until he could run for the another village, and that what we did for a while run." For a while Haji said he thought he was safe from the rebels, but they were not the biggest problem he faced. He did not expect to become a child soldier for the army. He described his time as a child soldier "I was at a village I did not know of the name of. I felt safe, the army was here and at a village nearby. The rebels attacked and the army was in a constant struggle to push them back and retreat. Eventually they took us boys into recruitment to help fight. We were taught how to shoot and clean our guns. They gave us all marijuana, what they called brown brown and some white pills. All we did for a few months was kill, raid rebel villages and do drugs. I remembering the only person I knew Kami being shot right in front of me. I froze and did not know what to do. I would have died if the shock wave from a grenade did not throw me down. Eventually I was chosen with a group of boys to be taken here to Freetown where I was rehabilitated. Now I only hope to move on from the war." Haji's story is one shared by too many boys in this country. Something needs to be done to stop it.