On 18th of December, 2016, rape survivors who received treatment at Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) recounted their emotional journey as the Centre marked its one year anniversary with a dinner in Enugu.

The Roban Hotel Conference hall was filled to capacity as both survivors, their families, WACOL/Tamar SARC staff, associates of the Centre, friends as well as funders, all gathered to celebrate service to humanity.

For the victims, receiving treatment at the Centre was an opportunity to live again. Some of the survivors, who struggled to contain their emotions, recounted their state of mind and health before and after receiving treatment at the centre. “I was so glad that I took that step” one of them, a 27-year-old lady said.

Sharing her experience in the hand of the perpetrator (which was done in camera) for purposes of confidentiality, the lady noted that due to the care and treatment she got from SARC, she had overcome both the physical injuries and the psychological trauma associated with rape.

“I felt so dejected, ashamed and alone after the incident. As a student, I lost interest in my studies. My grade decreased by a great margin, but after the treatment and counseling at Tamar SARC, I now understand the need to move on. I keep reminding myself that I cannot allow the rapist to beat me; he must be the one bearing the shame not me. I am satisfied now and even more satisfying is the fact that the rapist is currently in detention and facing trial, so that makes me feel safer,” she emphasized.

Another victim who says she hated men after the encounter, announced: “I swore that I would never have anything to do with men again after the incident, but I was forced to have a rethink because of the follow-up counseling I received in the Centre which made me to open up to men again in my life.”

In her speech, the Executive Director of Tamar SARC, Dr Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, gave a short history of the WACOL/Tamar SARC, and lamented that rape was increasing astronomically in the state.

Ezeilo opined that the malady had even taken a strange dimension because perpetrators now target children below 10 years as well as great grandmothers who are over 80 years. “This old woman who was getting close to her grave was badly raped and battered by a young man. This is not fair”.

She told the story behind choosing the name Tamar for the Centre, the
Biblical Tamar King David’s daughter was raped by her half brother Amnon and she felt shame, stigmatized and poured ashes on her body. Thereafter she confided in her brother Absolom who took laws into his hands and killed Amnon later. Dr Ezeilo mentioned that such a case as that of Tamar has been treated in the Centre as the lady was raped by her first cousin and was badly bruised.

She mentioned some of the cases that have been treated at the Centre representing different ages like the nine-year-old raped to death by a security man, the 10-month-old baby, 18-month-old baby, 2 years old baby all with diapers being violated. She stressed that these stories are not far-fetched but people think they are removed from us.

She wondered what would have been available remedies for those victims without organisations like Tamar SARC providing the medical and counseling support and WACOL providing legal aid, shelter to clients at the peak of their crises as well as creating awareness. She said that WACOL has so far provided free legal aid to over 34,000 clients, including SARC clients. Out of the number, about 80 per cent are from Enugu State.

Ezeilo added, despite the cultural differences in our society, we have to begin now to sensitise people to break the culture of silence and stop this blame-the-victim syndrome, and dwell more on educating our children on how to prevent rape. “We all wish away evil by saying it is not our portion, let us stop the pretence because it has not taken us anywhere. “She further called on the state government and legislators to double their efforts at stemming the epidemic through strong policies and legislations aimed at punishing the perpetrators.

Dr Ezeilo, who also served twice as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, said that WACOL established Tamar SARC as a result of the high number of sexual assault-related cases reported daily at WACOL. “We saw the need for a separate office for the sexual violence cases so as to enable us treat rape victims with the urgency and confidentiality it requires”. “Our staff at SARC are always overwhelmed with emotions due to the nature of the cases they receive daily. They want to resign from the job, but we keep encouraging them to stay and assist these people who genuinely need help through their services”. She stated that a lot of funders shy away from funding this type of project, but remained grateful to J4A for taking up this initiative.

Also in a remark, the delighted Grant Manager of DFID’s J4A, Mr. Godwin Odoh, thanked the government of Enugu State for their support to J4A, both towards SARC and all of its programmes in the state. Odoh noted that due to the successes recorded in the Enugu Centre, other states are now replicating SARC. He said that the Enugu Centre and Mirabel Centre in Lagos were the only two SARCs funded by J4A in the country, adding that the funding would soon come to an end. Thus he appealed to the state government to ensure sustainability when the Centre is finally handed over to them. The high point of the event was the presentation of merit awards to six WACOL/Tamar SARC staff, including the Centre Manager of SARC, Ms. Nkechi Nwabueze, for their outstanding work in providing services to humanity.

A 9-year-old survivor requested for audience to express her joy, her request was granted and she chanted:

I love you, you love me, 
We are best friends like friends should be, 
With a great big hug and a kiss from me to you, 
Won’t you say you love me too?

All the children joined in chanting the song which raised emotional tears from both parents and Tamar SARC care givers.

Speaking at the event, the Center Manager charged the kids to feel free and have some fun since the party was designed to make them happy this yuletide. They should not worry about what to eat or drink since the Centre was determined to make it a
memorable day for them. The children were pulled through to enjoy themselves by dancing, horse riding, merry-go-round, balloon chasing, among others. A dancing competition was organized and the best three children went home with lots and lots of gift packs. Others also received so many gift packs, toys and different categories of prizes for various competitions.

At the end, the parents were full of praises for the Centre for the thoughtfulness in organizing the party. According to one of them, a mother of 4-year-old survivor, “I am grateful to this Centre. They are so kind to us. I am so surprised at the level of their magnanimity. I can’t believe that this kind of kindness still exists anywhere in Nigeria. Even after all the free treatment, you still organized this party to make the children celebrate surviving the ordeal; it is wonderful, and I will continue to pray for you”.

Clergy Declare Support for Fight against Rape

Enugu, Jan. 24, 2016: Clergy men in Enugu State have demonstrated their resolve to join the fight against rape in the society.

The pledge was made when Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) visited various churches to sensitize the congregations on the prevalence of rape in the society, ways of preventing it, and the need to report rape to the appropriate authorities.

The Parish Priest in charge of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church, Coal Camp, Rev. Fr. Daniel Ani decried the menace of sex-related offences in the society and volunteered to be at the forefront of the war against rape. He frowned at parents who are more often too busy with their businesses and work, neglecting their most important role in life, which is protecting their children.

“If we don’t do something about this menace, we are going to lose more young girls. This does not speak well about the family responsibilities if we cannot protect the children given to us by God,” he noted.

However he charged the congregation to also report any rape incident to him to help them take the matter to Tamar SARC for proper treatment and care.

In his own view, the Resident Pastor at the Holy Ghost Baptist Church, Nsukka, Rev. Kaleb Aka, commended Tamar SARC for the sensitization drive which he noted, was educative and informative. Rev. Aka encouraged the Center to carry out such visits to churches more often. He promised that his church would create more platforms for future sensitization, especially the one that would target specific groups such as the youth.

“The youths are the ones who are both more vulnerable to be raped and more likely to be the perpetrators. That is why we must invite you to one of the youth programmes to talk to them” he emphasized.

Also speaking during one of the sensitization visits, Rev. Fr. Kalu of St. Peter’s Catholic Church, Garki promised to work with the Centre to ensure that the impunity of rape was reduced to the barest minimum. He said that this would be achieved through collaboration among the churches, NGOs and the government.

“We, as a church, are ever ready to join any fight to stop injustice to any man or woman in the society. However, we as the Roman Catholic Church condemn abortion, even if it can come in any guise, but as long as it is treatment and counseling, we are ever ready to join the fight”.

The General Overseer of Amazing Love Assembly Enugu Bishop Paul Nwachukwu who was full of appreciation to Tamar SARC for bringing the sensitization to the church, deemed it necessary to combine the church services comprising of children, youths and adults, noting the importance of the message of the Centre and its benefits to all and sundry. He also infused the message of the Centre “Stop Rape Campaign” into the sermon of the day which was delivered by Rev Dr. Chime. The Bishop also gave ample time to the congregation to react to the messages of the Centre.

Other churches visited during the sensitizations also threw their weight behind the Centre in the campaign to eliminate SGBVs in the society.

To reinforce the work of the Centre and their fight against the menace, the Catholic Bishop of Enugu Dioceses, Most Rev. Calistus Onaga, Anglican Bishop of Enugu Dioceses, Most Rev Dr. Emmanuel Chukwuma and the Methodist Arch Bishop of Enugu, Most Rev Barr. Christopher Ede, leaned their voices in the course and supports the eradication of this heinous crime in our society. They believed that it is a crime against God’s commandment and human development and thus should be tackled with all seriousness.
violence. End violence now!

Women and girls in especially difficult situation and victims of sexual and gender based violence. Our services include: free and comprehensive medical services, counseling, legal assistance and representation, shelter and other psycho-social support to ensure full recovery and reintegration of victims of this type of violence. We encourage victims to speak out and break the silence. Nigerian women are today marching in solidarity with women worldwide to say no to sexual violence! To say no to gender based violence! And to stand up to stop the violence. End violence now!

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In Nigeria, common forms of violence in Nigeria includes: Rape, Partner/Wife Battery/Spousal Beatings, Sexual Harassment, Trafficking in women for sexual and domestic labour; Female Genital Mutilation or Female Circumcision, Forced and Child Marriage, Acid Attack, Female body mutilation for ritual purposes, Denial of Inheritance Rights or share from the assets of deceased father or husband, Harmful Widowhood/Mourning Practices, Emotional Abuse, Abandonment of wife or children without means of subsistence, Sexual slavery, and Dedication to shrine etc. The signing into law on May 25, 2015 of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015 have for the first time introduced a comprehensive legislation on gender based violence although limited in jurisdiction to only the Federal Capital Territory (FCT); leaving out the entire 36 States of the Federation of Nigeria. At this occasion of United Nations Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women I want to call on government, especially the legislature at state levels to urgently replicate and adopt the VAPP Act 2015 to prevent and combat all forms of violence against persons results in cumulative breaches of their rights, including right to life, privacy and family life, right to dignity, liberty, freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment as well as sexual and reproductive rights. Whereas it is true that violence affects women and men, it unarguably affects women and girls disproportionately. A woman or girl for example who is raped would have to worry about unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections on top of violation of her right to bodily integrity and mental torture, trauma and emotional distress that are all aftermaths of incidence of sexual violence.

Violence against women and girls has reached an epidemic proportion in Nigeria and must be urgently addressed to check the impunity with which this heinous crime against humanity is committed. Violence against persons results in cumulative breaches of their rights, including right to life, privacy and family life, right to dignity, liberty, freedom from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment as well as sexual and reproductive rights. Whereas it is true that violence affects women and men, it unarguably affects women and girls disproportionately. A woman or girl for example who is raped would have to worry about unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections on top of violation of her right to bodily integrity and mental torture, trauma and emotional distress that are all aftermaths of incidence of sexual violence.

WACOL/Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) on November 19 2016, successfully trained and equipped 10 persons to spearhead the fight against sexual violence in rural communities. The behavior-change agents, who were selected from 10 communities across the state, were urged to, among other tasks to sensitise their communities and facilitate reporting of incidents that happened in their respective communities to Tamar SARC for immediate action. The centre manager, Miss Nkachi Nwabueze, also called on them to see themselves as defenders of humanity, having resolved to take up the challenge. She gave them guidelines for handling cases, including confidentiality of the client. The victims are not to blame, and the need to report cases within three days of occurrence. She emphasised that reporting of cases promptly gives victims hope because they would be examined and treated to prevent HIV/AIDS and other STIs. She also pointed out that encouraging victims to speak out and seek redress was critical to the elimination of sexual violence.

Nwabueze asked them to organise platforms in schools, churches, market places, and community forums etc where people could be educated on the issue of sexual violence and also to encourage them to report cases as soon as it happened. “Fighting the battle against sexual violence could be compared to fighting the killing of twins in the eastern parts of Nigeria. Today those who fought against killing of twins won the war and now we are all enjoying the booty, same should be applied to this menace called sexual violence“ she pointed out. In his own presentation, the BC officer at PATH2, Mr George Eki, said that communities needed to respond to the issue of rape without sentiment. “They should not suppress rape cases in the name of settlement because every rape leaves a lasting negative mark which could manifest in adulthood”. He enumerated the job of a BCA to include moving people to change their perception about a given issue and to believe that rape was a criminal offence; engaging with the gate keepers i.e. the community structures, village heads, church leaders, OMIs, CWOs, and the youth, among others on burning issues like rape in their various communities. Eki emphasised that, as change agents, they needed to push the change, report rape, and, above all, prevent it. He promised to train them more on interpersonal communication in the future.
Highlight of some cases reported to the centre.