

SURVIVORS' WATCH

March 2023

Eliminating Harmful Traditional Practices



WomenAid Collective

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ABOUT WACOL

WACOL is an independent, non-political, non-governmental and non-profit organization and registered in 2000 as a company limited by guarantee, i.e. as a charitable organization (RC: 388132) with the Corporate Affairs of Commission (CAC), Nigeria. WACOL's vision is democratic society free from violence and abuse, where human rights of all, in particular women and young people, are recognized in law and practice.

Its mission is to assist in the education, social, economic and political development of women and young people through a wide range of services: training, research, advocacy, shelter, free legal and financial aid, intra-familial/community conflict resolution, and information and library services.

WACOL works throughout Nigeria and beyond. WACOL has established itself as a credible and committed organization whose work is well recognized beyond the shores of Nigeria. It has an observer status with the African Union, African Commission on Human Rights (since 2001) and it also has an NGO Special Consultative status with the United Nations (approved in 2010 by ECOSOC). WACOL is a formidable organization that can boast of institutional capacity for sustainable work in the field of advancing human rights, gender equality, democracy and good governance.

WACOL in general works in four thematic areas, which are gender/human rights, peace advocacy/conflict resolution, democracy/good governance and reproductive health rights. It has also done some work in the area of STEM and climate change.

Editor's Statement

The survivors' watch is a platform created by WACOL to promote a safe space for victims and survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) to share their stories without any bias, conflict, intimidation, fear or threat. The survivors' watch seeks to capture the delicate and unique stories of survivors and victims, while empowering them with the strength of anonymity to own their truth and vocalise their lived experiences.

We understand the importance of supporting survivors and victims to tell their story at their

own time, giving them the opportunity to choose what aspect of their

story they wish to share. The survivors watch provides the

community and safe space for survivors and victims to not only express themselves but also trust that they will be respected while inspiring others to own their story and speak their truth.

This newsletter provides useful information about the issues survivors and victims of abuse experience in the society including emerging areas and trends. The survivors' watch further spotlights anti-SGBV tips and information. Discourse in the survivors' watch negates harmful bias/stereotypes, and promotes healthy practices to enable a safe environment for women and girls to flourish.



Prof Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (SAN, OON)
Executive Director of WACOL

HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES (HTPs)

By Aguoma Uzoamaka

In our various local communities, we have traditions that are being upheld. Sadly, a good number of these traditions are capable of damaging our developmental well-being. The factors that aid harmful traditional practices include but are not limited to poverty, ignorance, cultural and religious beliefs. These practices can obstruct societal advancement and have adverse effects on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of an individual. The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity’. Some of the harmful traditional practices in our communities include child marriage, intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation, male preference, tribal marks cutting, child labor, breast pressing, virginity testing, forced pregnancy, etc.

It is important to note that these practices violate the right to dignity of human persons as stated in the Nigerian Constitution. WACOL as a human rights organization has dealt with various cases of HTPs and helped sensitize and is still sensitizing people. Nigeria has various laws that have been implemented to fight these dangerous practices like the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) (VAPP) Act, Child Rights Act, Administration of Criminal Justice Act, Convention on the Rights of a Child, Criminal Code, etc. It is true that these traditions were passed down by our fore-fathers but culture is dynamic.

When a tradition is capable of causing grievous

physical or mental harm, it should be discontinued.



The effects of these harmful practices are constant tiredness, bruises and grievous harm, constant fear, anxiety, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, low self-esteem, anomaly in body development, suicide, drug and alcohol dependency etc. Unarguably, harmful traditional practices have destructive impact on not only the victims/survivors but society at large. Hence, it must be eradicated not preserved.

The ultimate duty lies on stakeholders to ensure that harmful practices are not encouraged or promoted, at all times respect must be given to the fundamental human rights of all individuals regardless of their status, age, religion or culture.

WAYS WE CAN ERADICATE HTPs

- **Public enlightenment and awareness on the effects of HTPs**
- **Human Rights Education**
- **Changing obnoxious cultural values and norms.**
- **Implementation of relevant laws.**

Harmful Traditional Practices



My friend why won't you let your daughter get circumcised? it is our custom

Yes, this is an age long tradition and some do it out of ignorance, poverty, religion, money etc.

What do you mean?

Harmful traditional practices are long term traditional practices that can cause harm or death to a person.

Do they die or get injured?

Sometimes, this harm is not physical but psychological. Practices like child marriage, male preference, female genital mutilation, child labor, breast pressing, virginity testing etc.

SGBV ILLUSTRATION: Harmful Traditional Practices

SUCCESS STORIES

*NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT SURVIVORS

FREEDOM FROM PHYSICAL AND FINANCIAL ABUSE

In her five years of marriage, Mrs. O. told WACOL that her partner had threatened to kill her and will always physically

in the usual modus of WACOL, a letter of invite was sent to Mr. O. At the joint session both parties were given the opportunity to tell their side of the story. After the session both parties agreed to leave separately, and contribute to the welfare of their children. They signed a memorandum of understanding to the effect Mr. O will cover their child's education expenses, medical costs, and feeding costs. Also, he was given access to the child, while Mrs O maintained custody. WACOL sternly cautioned Mr. O, and warned him against harassing Mrs O in any way. Due to WACOLs intervention, Mrs O has moved on managing a small business and helping to provide for her child's needs.

and verbally abuse her. They have a 3 -years old daughter together. Based on her request and

WACOL REUNITES MISSING CHILD WITH FAMILY



A bank security guard saw a young girl on the road, on inquiry he found out that she was missing and couldn't locate her family. He brought her to WACOL for safety. WACOL sprang into action by reaching out to the relevant institution to help investigate and locate her family. In the interim WACOL provided the girl with support and welfare till she was reunited with her family. She is now happily in the custody of her family.

POST-NATAL DEPRESSION

After Delivery, Mrs. T started feeling so down, withdrawn and detached. As a result, her daughter was taken away from her by her husband and his family. WACOL provided her with psychological support and follow ups to help her navigate the depression and also prioritize her well-being.



WIDOW REUNITED WITH CHILDREN

Mrs A lost her husband in a horrifying automobile accident few months ago, upon his demise his family took custody of his children and sent Mrs A away. She was advised to come to WACOL for intervention. WACOL invited the members of the deceased family and oversaw the subsequent release of her children.

WACOL TRAINS RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS IN ENUGU ON IMPLEMENTATION OF CHILD RIGHTS LAW

WACOL in collaboration with the European Union, Agents for Citizen-Driven Transformation and British Council organized a three-day training for state law officers, police prosecutors and other relevant stakeholders on the effective responses to child abuse and neglect in Enugu State. The training started on the 28th of March and ended on the 30th of March 2023 at Oaklands Hotel & Park, Enugu State.

On the first day of the program, the Founding Director of WACOL, Prof Joy Ngozi Ezeilo OON, SAN, gave the opening remark where she thanked all the participants for their presence and explained the purpose of the training. She emphasized on the need to protect the child and maintain proper implementation standards. In whatever decision or action to be undertaken concerning a child, the best interest of the child should be paramount.

The two facilitators for the training were Barr. Helen Kalu and Dr. Nwafor Ndubuisi. They did a great work connecting with the participants and explaining their roles in preventing child abuse. The facilitators also highlighted acts that may be seen as normal in the society but in act constitute child abuse. A line was drawn between child discipline and child abuse.

Participants were introduced to the concept of childhood, and made to understand who a child is under the law including the legal background of child rights/



the best interest of a child. It was an interactive session as all the participants were paired in groups to explain certain concepts using a case study.

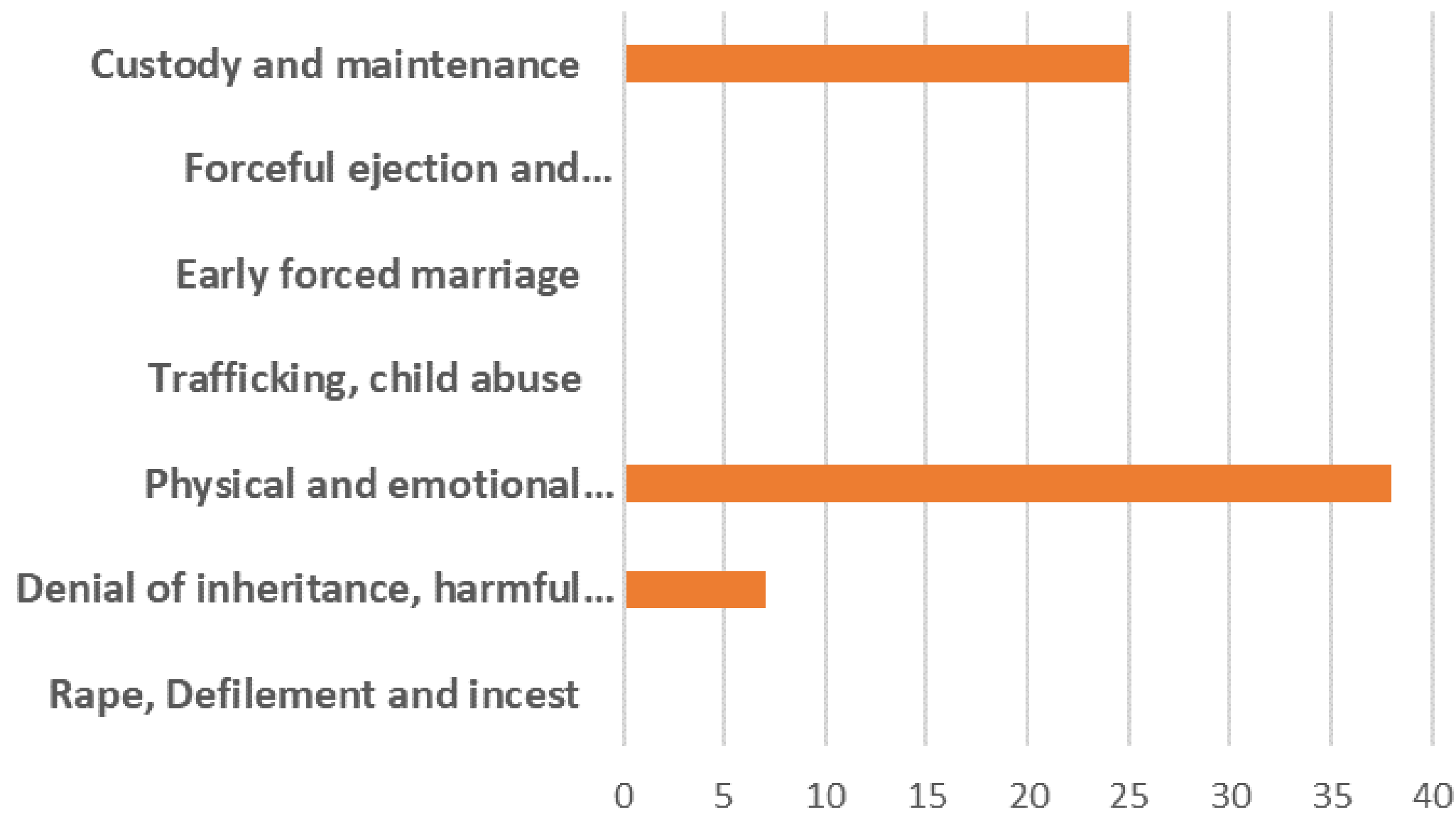
The second day of the training featured sessions on existing laws and policies on violence against children. The participants were taught how to assess life threatening factors and the preventive approaches. Available national laws were dissected.

On the third day of the training, the international laws protecting children were highlighted and examined. The participants learnt how to improve enforcement through investigative techniques, illustrated further with role plays. The training came to an end with the signing of a communiqué.

CASE BREAKDOWN

for March 2023

TYPES OF CASES



Gender Disaggregated data

-  Female complainants total: 60
-  Male complainants total: 10
-  Overall total: 70 cases.

Age Range

- Under 18: 2
- 18-24: 6
- 25-34: 22
- 35-44: 25
- 45-59: 9
- 60 and above: 5
- Unknown: 1

CONTRIBUTORS

Prof. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (SAN, OON) is the founding director of Women's Aid Collective (WACOL), she is the Emeritus Dean Faculty of Law, University of Nigeria and Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons.

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ADVERTISEMENT & UPCOMING EVENTS

To Report any threat or human rights violation call our hot-lines: (1) +2349060002128; (2) 09091333000; (3) 09092777000.



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