

SURVIVOR'S WATCH

NOVEMBER 2023

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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

OBINNA BANKS

Emerging Online Human Trafficking and Unsafe Migration Trends

By Goodness Esemé Ibangah

Trafficking in persons, illegal/unsafe migration represents a serious human rights violation in the world. Poverty, unemployment, lack of access to educational facility, ignorance, and displacement are major factors that encourage trafficking. The most common form of human trafficking is sexual exploitation (79%), and often times the victims of sexual exploitation are girls. In sub-Saharan Africa, 60% of trafficked victims constitute children with the larger chunk from west Africa. (*Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNODC*).

The Nigeria situation is terrible, a report by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTP) indicates that 1,112 cases of trafficking in persons were reported in the year under review with 35.8% being cases of sexual exploitation and illegal migration which in most cases are for prostitution. Traffickers generate massive profits from exploiting victims through illegal means such as fraud, deception and force.

There is barely any area of our modern life that is not affected by technology, technological innovations has changed the dynamics and operations of human trafficking and unsafe migration. It is important that as we celebrate the positive aspects of technology, we are mindful of how same features and innovations embolden traffickers, who are adapting by employing new tricks to expand their reach and network. Simply put, technology has revolutionised trafficking operations.

EMERGING ONLINE TRENDS

Depends on the user, technology can be a tool to enable human trafficking, illegal/unsafe migration or prevent and prosecute this modern day slavery.

Traffickers now use technology to:

- a. Recruit
- b. Exploit
- c. Control
- e. Finance

UNODC reports that “Traffickers are currently using technology to profile, recruit, control and exploit their victims as well as using the internet, especially the dark web, to hide illegal materials stemming from trafficking and their real identities from investigators.”

The COVID -19 pandemic provided an opportunity for companies and organisations to reflect on innovations for digital transformations. In the explicit words of Tiphany Crittin, UNODC Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Officer, “*Traffickers are quick to adapt their business model to suit their needs and increase their profits, so of course they follow online trends...The global nature of*

human trafficking and the abuse of technology makes it even more difficult for law enforcement authorities to tackle this crime.”

The digital space provides a massive platform for a greater number of potential victims to be exploited as physical and geographical limitations have become non-existent. Planning and implementation of trafficking activities is now remote, so traffickers can source for victims from continents apart. Unfortunately, enforcement agencies especially in developing countries are still digitally backward and lack the necessary digital expertise to carry out investigations.

Gaming sites, social media and other online social platforms have given room for increased grooming and exploitation including risk of privacy breach and blackmail. Child traffickers also use the internet to sexually abuse children for the entertainment of the viewer on the other end of the camera. Technology has enabled criminals to reach a larger audience of potential buyers of illicit contents, these traffickers procure and display such contents in real time. It makes it harder for victims to get justice because even after the content may have been pulled down, it must have been downloaded by many other people on various devices.

Indeed, the internet can be used to amplify the circulation of intimate pictures and videos of minors despite relevant national laws and policies in place. In April 2022, the sex tape of minors from Chrisland school, Lagos, Nigeria was released on social media by a blog and this generated a lot of outrage from members of the public.

Using online dating sites traffickers obtain vital details about target victims which sometimes includes pornographic content that they use to obtain compliance from the victims and further exploit the victim through blackmail. Traffickers now develop fake websites and promote advertisements on legitimate employment portals and social platforms. Most of these sites and platforms have option of a live chat which provides the trafficker with personal information about the targeted victims. During video calls with targeted victims, the traffickers will be able to get an insight into the environment and surrounding of the victim. In some cases, global positioning systems ((GPS) and location tracking applications can be used to ascertain the exact location of victims.

Through “dark web”, traffickers carry out transactions securely and without interception. Crypto-currency and other forms of online transaction have enabled them to to launder proceeds from this highly profitable crime. The pseudo- anonymity of cryptocurrency transactions help traffickers navigate the banking structure and the chances of being tracked and monitored by state authorities.

Social media is a powerful tool for traffickers to access victims by monitoring their activities to have enough information about them or even their loved ones. Often times the anonymous nature of technology interactions can permit sharing of harmful and degrading content that encourage and support human trafficking. Cyberspace footprint can be easy to leave depending on the users privacy knowledge and overall technology skill. It is important to know that social applications activities and engagements have the capacity to provide traffickers with personal information about their potential victims such as location, contact details, lifestyles and routines (people now generate intimate contents like Get Ready With Me (GRWM) etc.

Traffickers may reach out to them through a friendly direct message and then establish even closer relationships that will ultimately destroy the victim. In April 2021, Ini Umoren, a young graduate and job seeker was lured with a job interview from a Twitter follower, Uduak -Abasi Akpan who unknown to her was a trafficker and murderer. Even though Ini exercised caution before leaving home by sending the contact of the said Uduak to her sister and also sharing her location with her friend she was not spared.

In her chat with her friend, she expressed concern about the distance of the interview venue and tried to make a video of her environment but all her friend could hear was screams from the other end. This made her friend raise alarm on social media which prompted well meaning citizens and human rights defenders to call for speedy investigation into the report and tracking of Ini's whereabouts. Sadly, Ini was found few days after, raped, murdered and buried in a shallow grave within the premises of the killer. This further escalated the online outcry, the hashtag #JusticeforInnyUmoren trended on twitter for days. A year later, Uduak Abasi was sentenced to death by the court for the murder of Ini Umoren. The reality that this case is just one of many more is so difficult to sit with.

Without doubt, the devastating effect of human trafficking strengthened by technology can cause anxiety, depression, loss of job, friends, family and ultimately loss of life.

TECHNOLOGICAL DRIVEN SOLUTIONS TO CURB HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Technological innovations have changed the means of communication and work including how we respond and address human trafficking, unsafe/illegal migration issues. There is need to harness technology for good, exploring digital innovations to curb human trafficking in Nigeria and Africa. Technology has deeply enabled human trafficking and unsafe migration but has also positively impacted on the 4ps of human trafficking which are Protection, Prevention, Prosecution and Partnerships. Technology based solutions cut across artificial intelligence, data mining, data analysis, toll-free hotlines, anonymous reporting, digital safe spaces which can help to identify trafficking networks /victims, obtain necessary evidence for prosecution and provide support to victims and survivors of human trafficking/ unsafe migration. Stakeholders should recruit experts such as digital communications strategists, cybersecurity specialists, product managers, application designers, data analysts, researchers, social media managers and digital marketers in the fight against human trafficking and unsafe migration.

Investment into the creation of mobile applications that will enable victims and survivors of human trafficking to seek help and draw the attention of relevant institutions to impeding dangerous situations should be explored. Through location sharing options the victims can be tracked and monitored by the intervening agency, other features of the application should include but not limited to secured and private reporting, pictures and information of convicted traffickers/abusers and display of wanted traffickers /abusers.

SUCCESS STORIES

*NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT SURVIVORS

Child saved from Trafficking by father

Sylvia, a 17-year-old girl, is being compelled by her father to marry against her desires. Despite her pleas to prioritize education over marriage, she is facing resistance from her father. In-

ing out Sylvia's younger sister at the age of 13 to a man who was over 50 years old as a wife and she had long given birth to a child in this marriage.

Despite Sylvia seeking refuge at her younger sister's home to pursue education, Mr. Goodluck is determined to thwart her efforts and insists on her return home. Feeling powerless, she sought assistance from WACOL. Mr. Goodluck, when summoned to WACOL, refuted allegations of coercing her into marriage but acknowledged a suitor for his daughter. Sylvia, fearing coercion into marriage upon her return, voiced concern about her education prospects, citing no family member having completed secondary school.

WACOL, recognizing the urgency of Sylvia's plight, penned a letter to NAPTIP, urging an investigation into the potential trafficking peril lurking within her family. The call for intervention was not just for Sylvia but for the others entangled in the intricate web of familial expectations. In the corridors of advocacy, WACOL's action stood as a beacon, striving to dismantle the chains that bound Sylvia and her sisters.

sisting on Sylvia's marriage, Mr. Goodluck accepted money from a suitor considerably older than her. Engaged in a concerning pattern, he routinely marries off his daughters as a means of financial gain. He had succeeded in giv-

WACOL prevents land sale by husband.

Tina's heart echoed with the silent cries of desperation. Her husband, a solitary decision-maker, cast shadows of uncertainty over their lives. He had unilaterally sold their only car at a time, leaving Tina bewildered and the funds unaccounted for. Fearing a repeat of history, Tina sought refuge in WACOL's compassionate embrace when she sensed her husband's looming decision to sell their last piece of land.

In desperation, Tina poured her heart out to the empathetic souls at WACOL. Their intervention became a lifeline for her diminishing hope. WACOL stepped into the delicate matter of marital discord, striving to

bridge the chasm that threatened to consume their shared dreams.

Tina, worn but resilient, had exhausted every avenue to dissuade her husband, a man resistant to the counsel of others. WACOL, armed with patience and understanding, delicately navigated the storm that raged within their home.

Through mediation, WACOL succeeded where pleas had failed. Tina's husband, for the first time, reconsidered the irreversible path he intended to tread. The impending sale was halted, and a fragile peace settled over their once-turbulent abode.

Weeks passed after the settlement and the case monitored under the watchful eyes of WACOL. On the last adjourned date, Tina's voice trembled with gratitude as she thanked WACOL for breathing life back into her home. The land, once on the brink of slipping away, stood secure—transformed from a battleground to a sanctuary where the seeds of hope and understanding could take root once more.

Domestic Violence Ended and Husband Now Provides Welfare

Sophie's life was a silent tempest, marred by the oppressive shadows of her husband, Dike. Sophie was thrown out of her husband's house by her husband without any child or her personal belongings by Dike, her husband. Dike's jealousy, an ever-present storm, dictated the narrative of their marriage. From coercing her to quit her job to relocating neighborhoods, he controlled every facet of her life, fueled by baseless suspicions. The scars on Sophie's spirit bore witness to the physical and emotional abuse she endured.

In her plea at WACOL, Sophie's desire was simple yet profound – to reclaim her children and break free from the shackles of a suffocating marriage. WACOL, a beacon of hope, summoned Dike to the table of mediation.

The initial family meeting, a bid to reconcile both sides, yielded little success, as Sophie stood resolute in her decision to end the marriage. Undeterred, WACOL persisted, delving into the depths of Dike's insecurities and temper. Through intense efforts, a transformative promise emerged – Dike pledged to cease the violence, establish a business for Sophie, and shoulder the family's financial responsibilities.

In the aftermath of this commitment, diligent follow-ups revealed a metamorphosis in their lives. Dike, once a harbinger of pain, became a provider, offering sustenance and support. Sophie, freed from the chains that bound her, witnessed the dawning of a new chapter. The darkness of abuse lifted, making way for a semblance of happiness, as Sophie's journey with WACOL became a testament to the power of change and compassion.

Mother and Child Reunited

A's anguish pierced through the veil of uncertainty when her husband, B, took their 7-year-old child to an undisclosed location. The haunting fear of the unknown consumed her, but WACOL stepped in to unravel the threads of this heart-wrenching tale.

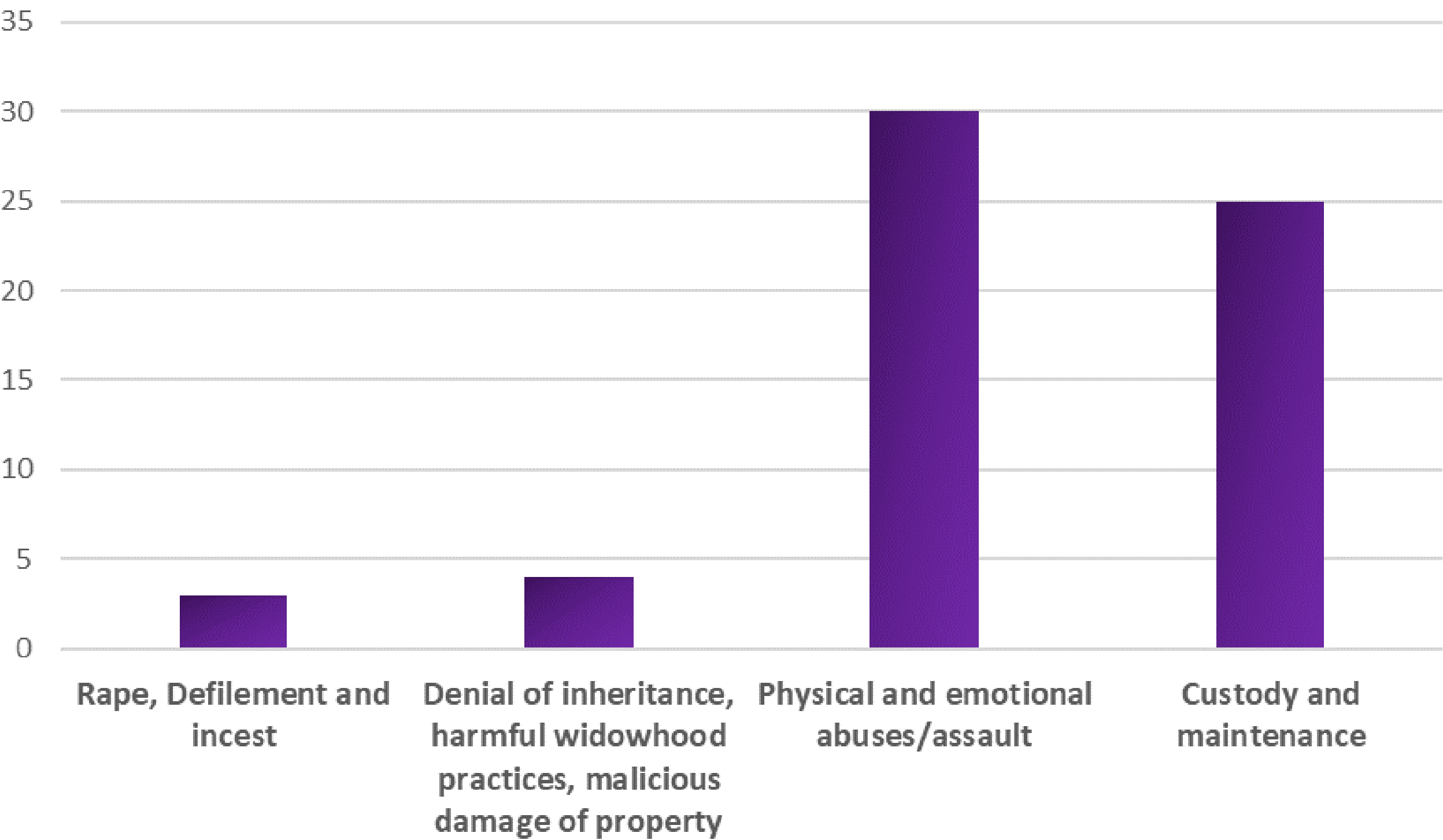
B, when summoned, offered a counter-narrative, asserting that A had abandoned their children under his care. Amidst his health challenges, his sister intervened, relocating the child to Kaduna. WACOL, the voice of reason, cut through the conflicting stories, instructing B to reunite the child with A, who would be granted custody of all three children.

B was compelled to contribute to the children's welfare, ensuring financial support for their upbringing. Access to the children in A's custody became a bridge for B to remain a part of their lives.

The resolution, a delicate equilibrium of shared responsibilities, brought relief. A was joyously reunited with her child, and B, now an active participant in the children's lives, embraced his role in their welfare. WACOL's intervention became the catalyst for a harmonious arrangement, stitching together the torn fabric of familial bonds.

CASE BREAKDOWN

for August 2023



Gender Disaggregated data



Female complainants total: 52



Male complainants total: 9



Overall total: 62 cases.

Age Range

Under 18: 2

18-24: 5

25-34: 18

35-44: 17

45-59: 10

60 and above: 2

Unknown: 8



CONTRIBUTORS

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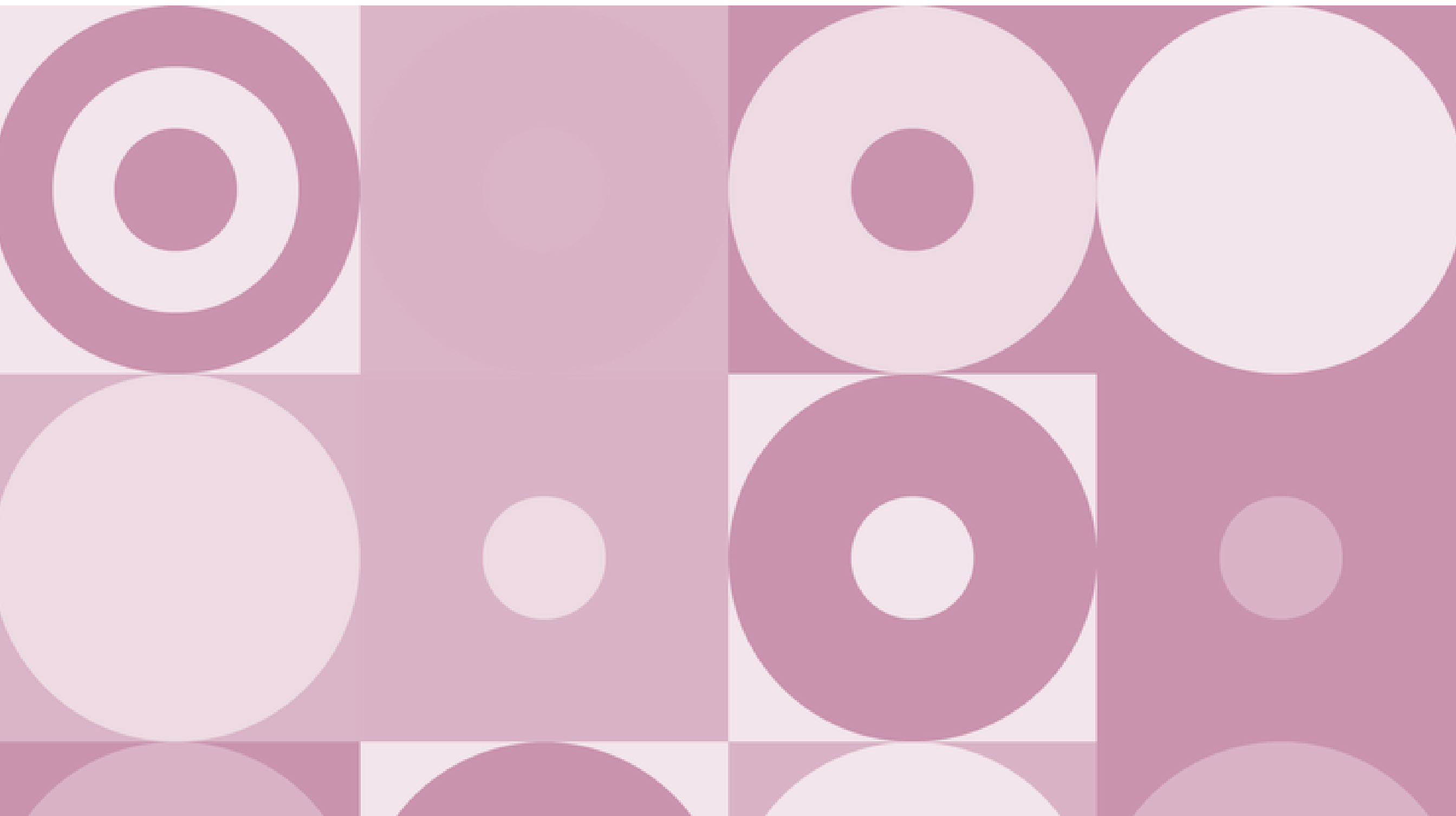
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ADVERTISEMENT & UPCOMING EVENTS

To Report any threat or human rights violation call our hotlines:
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