



SURVIVOR'S WATCH

SEPTEMBER 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

EMPOWERING WIDOWS: Challenging Widowhood Practices in Nigeria

By Omekedo Efemena Elohor

Introduction

Widowhood is a challenging and emotional period in any woman's life, but in Nigeria, it often comes with an additional burden - the burden of cultural practices and societal expectations that can lead to harsh maltreatment of widows. This article delves into the traditional widowhood practices in Nigeria and explores ways to protect widows from the hardships they face from society and even within their own families.

The Widows' Plight

In many Nigerian communities, widowhood is more than just a personal loss; it is a social and cultural crisis. Widows are often subjected to a range of harsh practices and discrimination, including forced isolation, confiscation of property, and even violence. These practices are rooted in deep-seated traditions that view widows as impure, cursed, or responsible for their husband's death.

Traditional Widowhood Practices

1. **Isolation:** One of the most harmful practices is the forced isolation of widows. They are often banished from their communities, forced to live in destitution, and cut off from their social support networks.
2. **Property Inheritance:** In many cultures, widows are denied their inheritance rights. Their deceased husband's property is often seized by his family, leaving the widow and her children homeless and destitute.
3. **Mourning Rites:** Widowhood mourning rites are often dehumanizing. Some require widows to shave their heads, wear tattered clothes, and engage in humiliating rituals to prove their innocence in their husband's death.
4. **Stigmatization:** Widows are stigmatized and blamed for their husband's death, often being accused of witchcraft or infidelity. This societal ostracism can lead to emotional trauma and further isolation.

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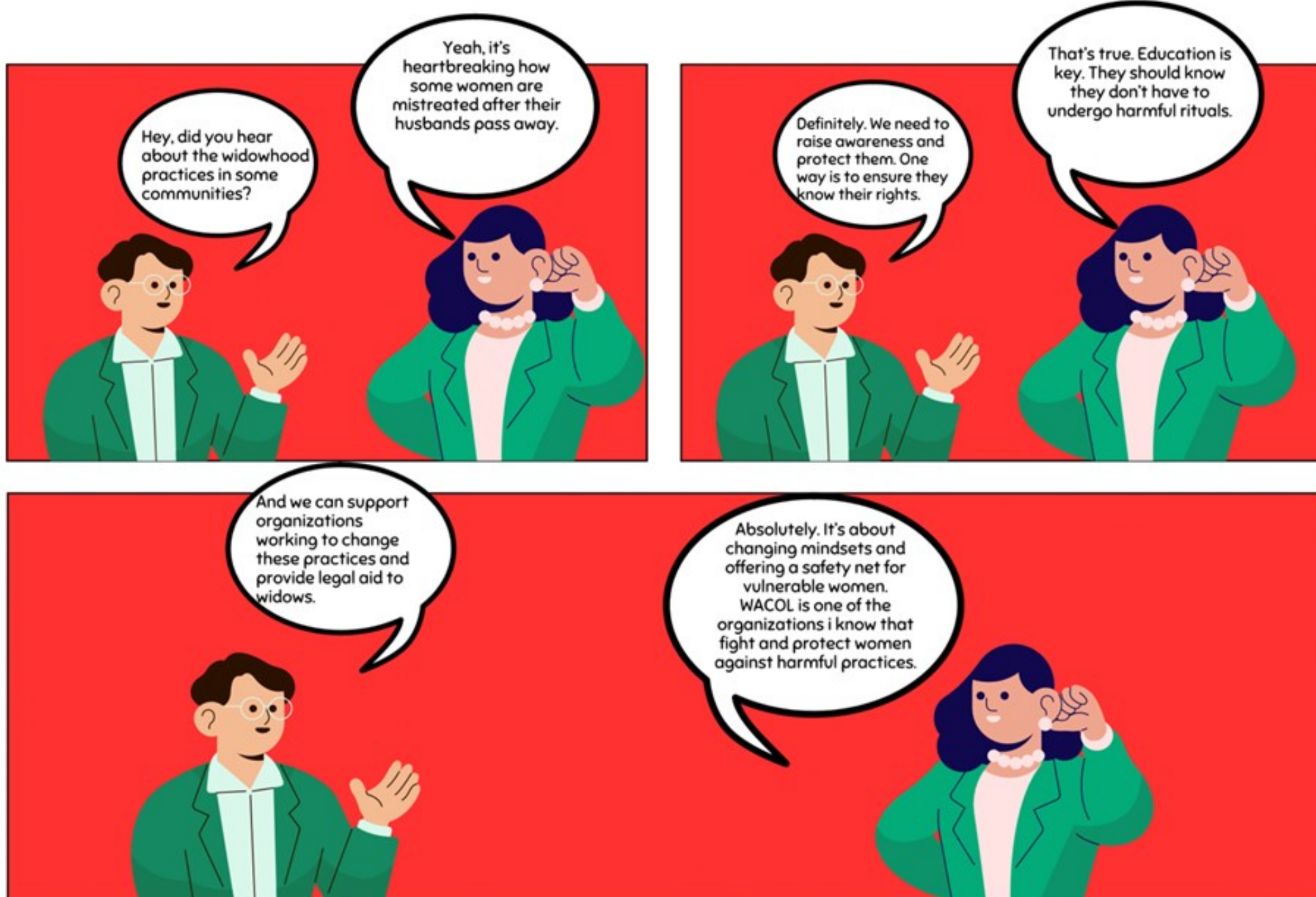
Protecting Widows

1. **Legal Reforms:** Nigeria has made significant strides in protecting widows through legislative reforms. The 1990 National Commission for Women Act and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) are steps in the right direction. However, effective enforcement of these laws is crucial.
2. **Education and Awareness:** Promoting awareness about widows' rights and the harmful effects of widowhood practices is essential. Community leaders, religious institutions, and NGOs can play a pivotal role in changing attitudes and behaviors.
3. **Economic Empowerment:** Supporting widows in gaining financial independence through skill training, access to microloans, and entrepreneurship programs can help alleviate their economic vulnerabilities.
4. **Counseling and Support:** Mental health support and counseling services can help widows cope with grief, trauma, and societal pressures. These services should be readily available and stigma-free.
5. **Advocacy and Networking:** Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations can create a more coordinated effort to protect widows' rights.

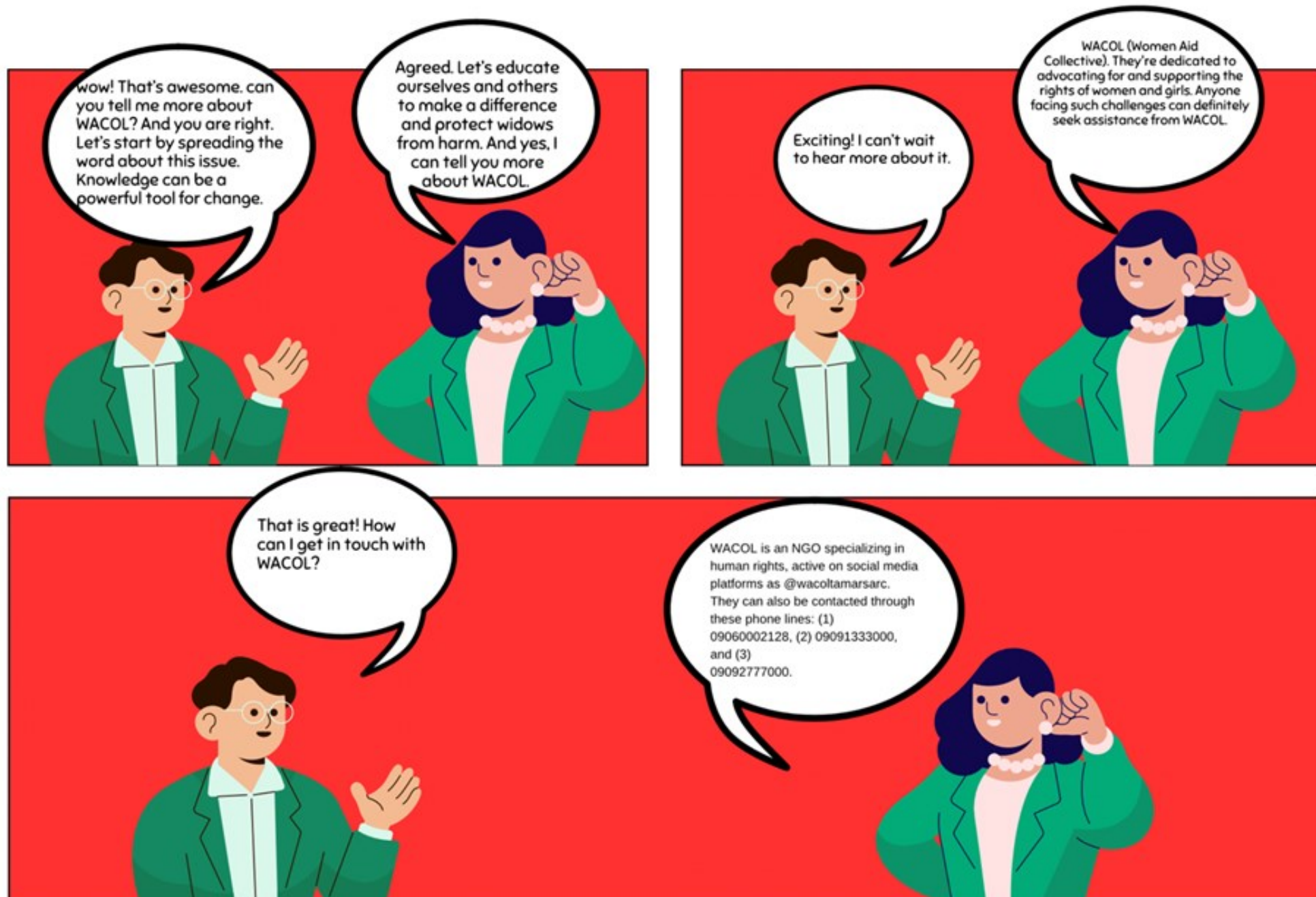
Conclusion

Widowhood should not be a sentence to suffering and discrimination. It's time to challenge the harmful widowhood practices deeply ingrained in Nigerian culture and society. Protecting widows from maltreatment is not only a matter of human rights but also essential for the social and economic development of Nigeria as a whole. Let us stand together, raise our voices, and work towards a Nigeria where widows are treated with dignity, respect, and compassion.

BREAKING THE CHAINS



BREAKING THE CHAINS



SUCCESS STORIES

*NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT SURVIVORS

RESOLVING FAMILY CONFLICTS THROUGH MEDIATION: A CASE STUDY

In a small corner of Abakpa, Nigeria, a story of joy, hope, and betrayal unfolded in the lives of Amarachi and Emmanuel Ugochukwu. On March 10th, 2022, their world was filled with excitement as Amarachi went for an ultrasound at the Abak-

themselves grappling with a medical bill. To their shock, the hospital demanded a total payment of 3,000 Naira before releasing the ultrasound results that had once filled their hearts with hope. Without hesitation, Amarachi and Emmanuel scraped together the sum, eager to learn more about their impending bundle of joys.

With the ultrasound results in hand, their anticipation grew. They shared the exciting news with family and friends, making preparations for the arrival of their twins. Their home was transformed to accommodate the new additions to their family, and their hearts brimmed with happiness. The day of delivery finally arrived, and the couple embarked on what should have been a journey filled with joy and expectation. The ride to the hospital was one of hope and new beginnings as they prepared to meet their long-awaited children. Little did they know that their dreams would soon be shattered, and they would be thrust into a situation far beyond their control.

Emmanuel, emotionally burdened, recounts the harrowing events that followed. Upon reaching the hospital, he was informed that they needed to pay a staggering 40,000 Naira for the delivery, a sum they were unprepared for. Desperate and torn between the need to provide for his wife and children and the lack of funds, he voiced his concerns to the hospital management. To his dismay, he was met with the response that this exorbitant demand was standard procedure. Faced with no alternative, he reluctantly left to seek the funds, leaving his wife alone in the hospital. Fear and anxiety gripped him as he embarked on this urgent quest to secure the money needed to pay their hospital bills.

pa Health Center, revealing the wonderful news that they were expecting twins. Little did they know that this moment of happiness would soon turn into a heart-wrenching ordeal. Fast forward to March 23rd, 2023, the Ugochukwu family found

Upon his return, he received news that his wife had already given birth and was placed in the common ward. With excitement and relief, he rushed to meet his family, only to be met with a cruel twist of fate. Instead of the expected twins, there was only one child. Confusion turned to shock, and Emmanuel demanded answers. The hospital's response was far from satisfactory. He was asked to sign a consent form for surgery, yet no hospital card or birth certificate was provided. The absence of a plausible explanation left the Ugochukwu family in turmoil. Accusations soon followed, as some family members speculated that the couple had sold one of their children to make money.

The Ugochukwus found themselves trapped in a nightmarish scenario, seeking legal representation to unravel the truth. In the midst of their ordeal, the Ugochukwu family encountered another disheartening twist. Their pro-bono lawyer, who had initially promised to stand by their side, delivered shocking news to Emmanuel. If they chose to withdraw from the case, they would be obligated to pay the lawyer a hefty sum of 5,000,000 Naira. This revelation cast a shadow of doubt on their legal representation.

Despite their lawyer's assurances, a cloud of suspicion loomed. He refused invitations to meet with WACOL (Women's Aid Collective) and even evaded meetings with the State Criminal Investigation Department (CID). It became increasingly clear that something was amiss. Allegations of bribery began to surface. The lawyer confided in WACOL that he, too, had been offered a bribe but staunchly declined. However, the circumstantial evidence painted a different picture, suggesting that he may have succumbed to the allure of corrupt practices.

The Ugochukwu family's case had been lingering since the previous year, and they were informed by the police that it was a closed matter. Shockingly, they were told that their child was missing. It was only when WACOL took up the case that a glimmer of hope emerged. A crucial meeting was convened, bringing together WACOL, the Ugochukwu family, and the new Commissioner of Police. The police expressed their intention to charge the sonographer, who, in a rare admission of error, confessed to a mistake unprecedented in her career. However, the plot thickened upon further investigation.

The sonographer admitted that on the day of delivery, she had indeed confirmed the presence of twins. She now found herself listed as a suspect. Her superiors, when summoned, disavowed any knowledge of the incident, asserting that she was unqualified to handle such cases. Investigations, however, revealed that the sonographer was, in fact, qualified, holding a degree from the University of Lagos. The police's initial plan was to charge the sonographer and the management but not directly implicate the hospital. This approach was met with strong resistance from WACOL, who insisted that all parties, including the hospital, should face charges.

Amarachi bravely recounted her experience with the hospital. She recalled being awake during the birth and witnessing the delivery of two babies. When she inquired about her children, she was met with violence—slapped twice and ordered to remain silent, lest she expose their illicit activities. Emmanuel, too, had a harrowing tale to share. On the day of her labor, they arrived at the hospital. However, they faced a delay until 8 am, and instead of transferring her to Parklane Hospital, as is typically done professionally, she was taken to another less reputable hospital within the community. He also admitted to being coerced into signing forms against his will. After refusing, the management resorted to forging his signature unlawfully.

Presently, the Commissioner has dispatched inspectors to oversee the case. WACOL's unwavering support has breathed new life into their pursuit of justice. Their efforts extend beyond the immediate legal battle, including reaching out to the Nigerian Medical Association of Nigeria, Enugu Branch. As the Ugochukwu family continues to navigate this tumultuous journey, one thing remains certain: the resolute determination of WACOL ensures that Amarachi and Emmanuel Ugochukwu will not rest until they are reunited with their missing child. Justice may be elusive, but their fight for truth and accountability persists.

In their darkest hour, the Ugochukwu family turned to the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) for help, hoping to find justice and answers to the painful questions that haunted them. Their story is a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by many families in Nigeria's healthcare system and the dire need for transparency, accountability, and justice. The Ugochukwu family's journey continues, as they strive to uncover the truth and seek justice with WACOL's help for their family's shattered dreams.

Jennifer's Journey:

A Tale of Unyielding Sisterhood in the Pursuit of Justice

In August, WACOL's spotlight falls upon a remarkable individual: 6-year-old Jennifer (names have been altered to preserve anonymity). Jennifer's sister, Janet, graciously shares her sibling's inspiring narrative. Following a return from a journey, Jennifer confided in Janet, divulging a revelation that would shake the very foundations of their world. At the forefront of a private medical care facility, Janet, a dedicated young nurse, plays a pivotal role in her family. With her mother and younger sister Jennifer as dependents, she assumes the mantle of the household's primary breadwinner. Janet's unwavering commitment to her hospital profession underscores her steadfast devotion and tireless work ethic.

Upon Janet's return from a business trip, she discerned an unidentifiable shift in Jennifer's demeanor. Despite her inability to pinpoint the nature of this change, Janet opted to engage Jennifer in a compassionate conversation. The revelation that followed not only stunned her but also inflicted profound emotional distress, leaving her in a state of bewilderment, indigna-

tion, and an unwavering determination to procure justice for her sister and her family. Jennifer confides in her sister, Janet, disclosing a distressing incident involving the hospital's security personnel who also serves as an errand aide for staff residing in the living quarters of the staff compound. Shockingly, Jennifer reveals that during her moments of absence, this individual unlawfully enters their home and subjects her to inappropriate physical contact. When Janet delicately probes for further clarification on the nature of these actions, Jennifer, using child-appropriate language, describes the perpetrator's conduct, involving oral and penetrative sexual offenses.

Upon inquiring about the duration of these harrowing experiences, Jennifer reveals that they have persisted for a considerable period. Compounding the gravity of the situation, Jennifer discloses that Sunday, the security personnel, has employed continuous threats to intimidate her into silence, with dire warnings of harm and even brandishing a common kitchen implement known as a "turning garri," which is typically used in Nigeria for preparing a local dish called eba. These threats have left Jennifer in a state of perpetual fear, inhibiting her from confiding in anyone except her sister, Janet, to whom she finally opens up.

Janet describes a tumultuous range of emotions upon learning of her sister's ordeal. She employs her smartphone to delicately examine Jennifer's physical condition, revealing evidence of distressing injuries, abrasions, and tears in her intimate areas.

This sight triggers an overwhelming emotional response in Janet, leading to her emotional breakdown. Janet goes on to reveal that Jennifer's disclosure also helps shed light on previously perplexing changes in her sister's behavior, including increased frequency of urination and abrupt shifts in demeanor. Following her discovery of the distressing truth, Janet takes immediate action by placing a call to the hospital's Managing Director (MD), earnestly requesting an urgent meeting to address the grave matter at hand. In response, Janet is promptly invited to partake in this crucial discussion. Upon entering the meeting space, she is greeted by the MD, the hospital manager, and a security personnel known as Oga Friday.

Throughout the course of this meeting, Sunday vehemently refutes all allegations leveled against him, steadfastly denying his involvement in the reprehensible acts of raping and sexually assaulting the six-year-old victim, Jennifer. This blanket denial leaves Janet oscillating between a tumultuous blend of anger and confusion, grappling with the disheartening situation.

Seeking clarity on the subsequent steps to be taken, Janet presses for answers. In response, the hospital's MD advises her to ensure that Jennifer receives necessary medical attention at the hospital. Inquiring about Sunday's status within the hospital, Janet is informed that he will be terminated from his employment. Regrettably, the anticipated termination fails to materialize, and instead, Sunday seemingly draws newfound audacity from the situation, brazenly taunting both the victim and her family.

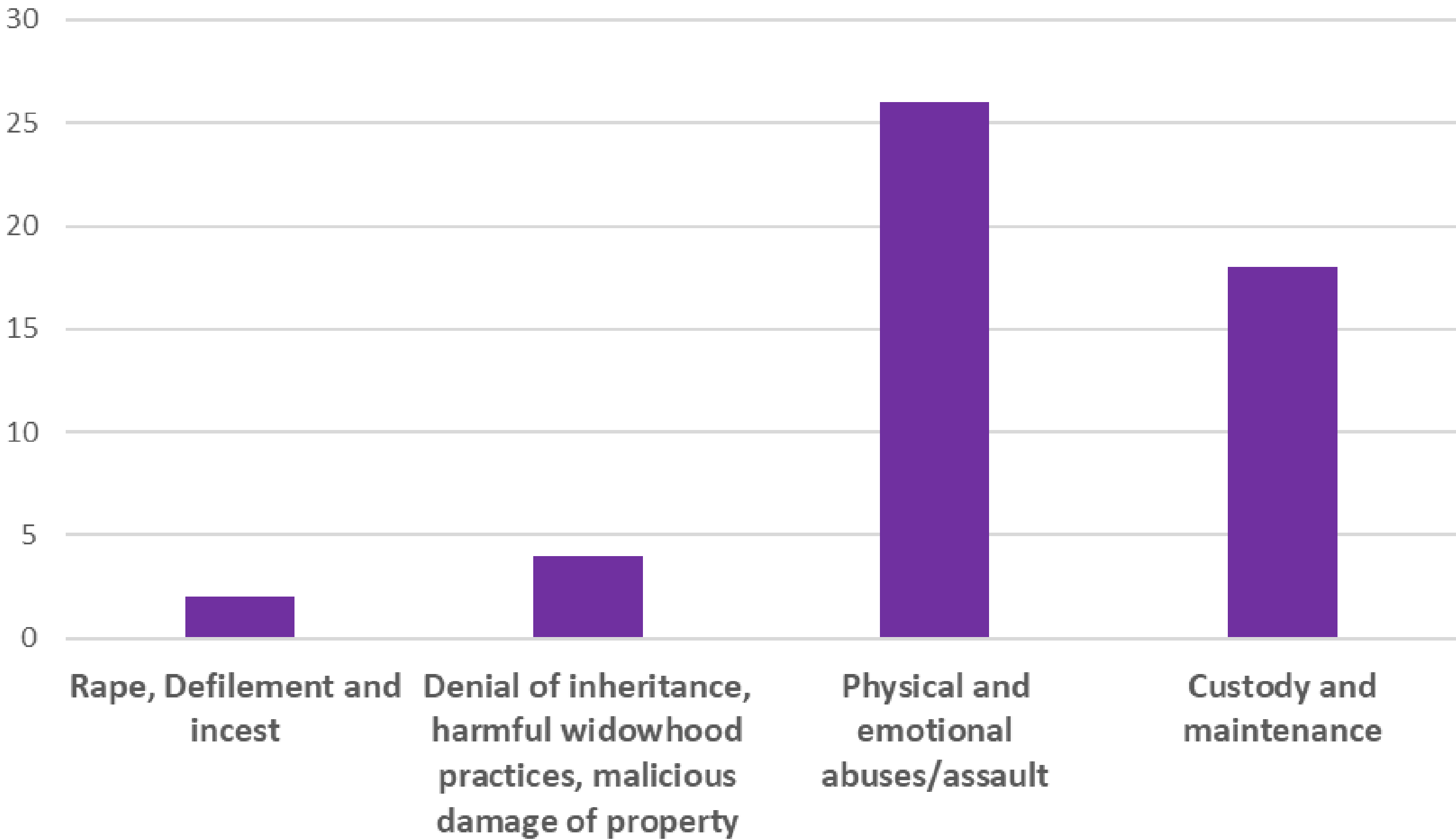
Overwhelmed by sorrow and dissatisfaction with the handling of the matter, Janet reaches out to the hospital manager, expressing her intention to engage with TamarSac, an external organization. Her decision is borne out of the hospital's apparent failure to address the situation with the required sensitivity and professionalism. The hospital manager assents to her course of action, allowing her to initiate contact with TamarSac as well as the local police station.

In her quest for justice and resolution, Janet navigates the complexities of the situation, determined to ensure her sister's well-being and hold accountable those responsible for the grievous acts inflicted upon Jennifer.

Janet takes a significant step by visiting the local police station, where she is provided with a police report that directs her to seek a medical examination from ParkLane Hospital to substantiate Jennifer's account. However, upon arriving at the hospital, they discover an ongoing strike, prompting the rescheduling of their appointment. On the subsequent visit, they follow instructions to procure menstruating pads at a cost of 2,000 naira, only to encounter another roadblock due to the unavailability of the doctor.

CASE BREAKDOWN

for August 2023



Gender Disaggregated data



Female complainants total: 48



Male complainants total: 8



Overall total: 56 cases.

Age Range

Under 18: 0

18-24: 2

25-34: 31

35-44: 21

45-59: 8

60 and above: 2

Unknown: 3



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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Ibangah Esemé Goodness Esq. is a Communicator, Women Human Rights Defender and Digital Enthusiast. She is the program manager of WACOL GirlsWill Initiative.

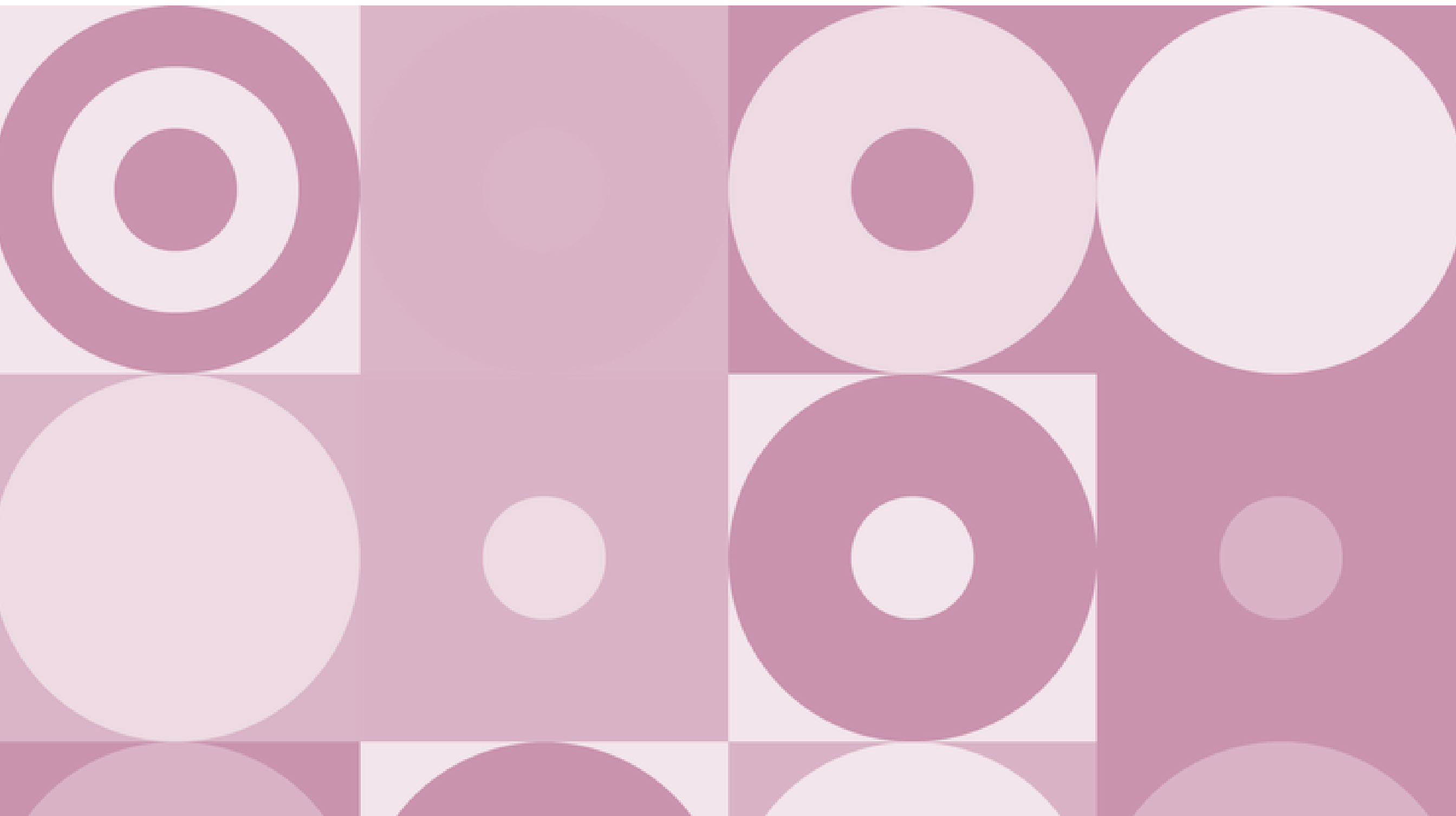
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