



HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at Harmful Traditional Practices Against women like Child Marriage which involves children ranging from the ages of 10 – 17 years and the implications of such harmful acts, female genital mutilations maltreatment of widows and denying them of inheritances. It also looks at the reasons for such dangerous traditional practices and recommends very strict measures to government at both Federal, state and Local Government levels to strengthen existing laws so that those involved in these acts be made to suffer very harsh penalties for their wrong acts. It draws its facts basically from the internet, prints, libraries and relevant texts, publications and discussions.

Key words: *Harmful, traditional practices, genital mutilations, maltreatment, widows, child marriage.*

Introduction

Harmful traditional practices against women in Africa started long ago and certainly Nigeria is not exempted from this ugly and ungodly practices. These dangerous practices run through the female life circle from childhood through adolescence and even marriage. And at each stage of such practices the woman is conditioned to go through very dehumanizing conditions and made to suffer deep pains thereby devaluing the person of the woman and making her to suffer untold hardship. Most of these ugly and dangerous practices are male championed and this is traceable to the patrilineal system of so many communities which gives only the men the right to inherit properties and many other privileges while the woman is not given any place simply because she is

a woman and will be married out someday to another man and so she is not seen as a member of the family.

According to convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24 (3) CEDAW (Articles 2, 5 and 16) and Regional Instrument. Harmful traditional practices constituting violence against women and girls can include acid violence, breast flattening, comestic mutilation, dowry and bride price, early forced marriage and marriage by abduction/rape, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGMFC), honour crimes, corrective rape and female infanticide, ritual sexual slavery, virginity testing, practices related to initiations or mensuration, some widowhood rituals and accusations of witchcraft of older women.

Most of these harmful traditional practices are carried out with out the consent of the girls and women involved, a violation of human rights as set out in Universal Declaration of Human Rights as with all forms of violence against women and girls.

Harmful traditional practices are a product of social norms aimed at upholding cultural values. Particularly concerning gender roles and social relations. Many of these practices, including acid violence and sex selective abortion, have become common relatively recently but may be considered harmful traditional practices as they are rooted in and upheld by such ideas.

Knowing and understanding the pains, trauma, depression, devaluations, oppression and intimidations involved in all these Action, Aid UK – Gender and development Network – womankind International planned parenthood Federation – Orchid project insists that the word “Traditional in the context of harmful traditional practices remains in the definition of these ugly practices and making it known to all that excuses of religions culture, or superstitions are not enough to violate the fundamental human rights of women.

Theoretical framework

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines feminism as the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men: the struggle to achieve this aim” (Homy 560) while the New Approach Dictionary of living English defines” Feminism as a belief or movement advocating the cause of women’s rights and opportunities. Particularly equal rights with men by challenging inequalities between sexes in the society.

(Sohoni 200). Feminism is generally the struggle for the rights and welfare of the woman, in a fast growing world where the woman is becoming more and more relevant. We must admit that if women are given their place in the society, in all spheres of life, things will certainly get better because it has become very clear that men alone can not do it. This is why this literary work is anchored on the theory of feminism.

Methodology

This study basically relied on discussions, with stakeholders, internet, research studies, library informations and analysis from relevant texts for the purpose of this work.

Forms of harmful traditional practices against women

There are various forms of harmful traditional practices against women ranging from one community to the other. Some of these harmful practices include:

- (a) **Child Marriage:** This is a practice where a girl that is not matured or even old enough is given out for marriage against her wish. A child that is supposed to be taken care of by the parent until she gets to the age of reasoning is forced to marry a much more older man to become a housewife and manage a home when she is not even able to manage herself. According to UNICEF 2016, 43 percent of girls in Nigeria are married before the age of 18 years and this kind of situation is more common in the northern part of Nigeria and this has led to several complications where the girls involved becomes victims and are abandoned. This practice is totally unacceptable and must be stopped at all cost.

Why child marriage is harmful

Early marriage is very harmful to girls in so many ways:

- (i) It Leads to withdrawal of girls from school
- (ii) These girls are made to shoulder marital and reproductive responsibilities they are not matured to handle, both physically, mentally and psychologically.

- (iii) Early pregnancy which is another very serious problem in child marriage which is likely to be one of the main reasons for the much higher maternal mortality and greater prevalence of conditions such as VVF/RVF in Northern Nigeria. The continual leakage of urine and/or feces by VVF/RVF victims results usually in their being rejected by their husbands and become dejected and socially ostracized while a lot of them end up in the streets as beggars to survive.

According to 2017 data from the multiple indicator cluster survey (UNICEF 2018) child marriage is much more prevalent in the Northern part of Nigeria. Global evidences shows that girls married before the age of 18 have higher rates of repeated unwanted pregnancies, obstetric fistula and intimate partner violence (Erulkar 2013).

According to UNFPA 2013, children of young mothers are more likely to be uneducated and have poorer health and financial prospects than children born to adult mothers. This is why the challenge of combating traditional harmful practices against women featured prominently in the fourth World conference on women and development held in Beijing in 1995.

- (b) **Female Genital Mutilation:** World Health Organisation (WHO) (1994), defines “female Genital Mutilation as” all procedures which involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia and/or injury to the female genital organ whether for cultural or any other non therapeutic reasons.” According to (WHO), the FGM does not only have very dangerous health implications including the risk of infection and even death, because of the improper sanitary conditions in which it is generally practiced but it symbolizes the subjugation of the woman and the control of female sexuality. And in most cases, this is done at a very young age where the consent of the victim is not sought for, thereby violating the fundamental human right of the woman/girl child.

Types of female Genital mutilation

World Health Organization “WHO” classifies FGM into three major groups. They include:

- i. Clitoridectomy: This is the least severe form of the practice and involves the removal of the prepuce or the hood of the clitoris and all or part of the clitoris itself. In Nigeria, this involves excision of a part of the clitoris.
- ii. The second type involves the removal of the clitoris along with partial or total excision of the labia minora and this is usually more painful
- iii. The third type which is known as infibulations is the most severe form of FGM, which involves the removal of the clitoris, the Labia Minora and adjacent medial part of the labia minora and stitching of the vaginal opening, leaving an opening the size of a pinhead to allow for the flow of urine and menstrual blood.
- iv. Other unclassified types are introcision and gishiricuts, pricking, piercing, or incision of the clitoris and/or Labia, scraping and/or cutting of the virgina (angryacuts) stretching the clitoris and/or labia.

The Cauterization introduction of corrosive substances and herbs in the virgina.

FGM is practiced in about 28 African countries and also in a few other communities scattered all over the world. The countries in Africa are Egypt, parts of West and East Africa where it has been cultural practice of many ethnic groups for a very long time. According to the “WHO” report the highest prevalence rates are found in Somalia and Djibouti where FGM is virtually universal.

According to Nationwide studies carried out by the 1999 NDHS (NPOPC, A-200) and the National baseline survey of positive and harmful traditional practices affecting women and girls in Nigeria, conducted by the center for Gender and social policy studies at Obafemi Awolowo University on behalf of UN (UNDS, M-1998, shows that the practice of

FGM is more common in the southern parts of Nigeria, with 77 percent among adult women followed by the south East with (68) percent and south-west with (65).

(c) Maltreatment of widows:

In Africa, so many communities don't treat widows well, lots of widows are suffering. In Nigeria particularly, so many ethnic groups have their own cultural practice in relation to how widows are treated. But one thing I see that is general and cuts across most ethnic groups in Nigeria is the fact that when men die their wives mourn them so much. The condition of various cultural practices are such that it is compulsory for the women to mourn their husbands and the mourning takes various forms, like in the south-south part of Nigeria in Delta State (the Ukwanis) the woman is made to mourn her husband for one year, putting on black blouse and wrapper, she is not allowed to do any work. But I have never seen any community where the men mourn their wives. That is to say, I have never seen any community where it is culturally compulsory for the man to mourn his late wife, so most of the cultural laws have been put in place by men to safe guard their selfish interest and also to oppress and intimidate the woman, that is why you see some men, when their wive's die, they cannot even wait for three (3) months before going to marry another woman. But it is very difficult to see any woman involved in such a thing. The woman will always mourn her late husband.

We equally have the problems of not giving the woman any property when the family is sharing the late husband properties. It is equally believed that the woman can not have a say in family decisions; all because she is a woman, but men have decided to mortgage their conscience to greed, ego and covetousness forgetting that without the woman, procreation will cease to exist life will become hell for the men. A lot of women after the death of their husbands are thrown into very difficult times because most of the privileges are taken away from them by the brothers and sisters of the late husband for example. In so many situations, the woman is forced to leave the house where she has spent the better part of her life with the late husband particularly when the woman has no child for the man. This is devilish and totally unacceptable

and must therefore be fought with every available means to put an end to it.

(d) **Hawking**

Hawking is another Practice I consider very dangerous for the girl child and the underage boy. Hawking exposes the children both the girl and the boy to so many forms of danger, particularly in our world of today where so many people have become so inhuman, callous and devilish. Below are some of the hazards the children are exposed to while Hawking.

Rape: the girl child is exposed to a very high risk of being raped in the process of hawking, some of the parents insist that the girls must sell all their goods before returning home, so because of fear of the parents, they innocently and desperately enter every corner and even houses, being very tender, they unknowingly run into dangers by entering dangerous corners where hoodlums and gangsters hang out, and these have led to the raping of several innocent girls, this practice is very common in the Nigeria of today and must be frowned at very seriously.

(e) **Begging:** This is another very ugly side of some traditional practices in Africa, particularly Nigeria, (the Northern part). This is a situation where parents deliberately shy away from the responsibility of taking care of their children and push them into the streets to beg. Thereby exposing them so many forms of risk like, kidnap, rape, accidents, and many work.

(f) **Son Preference:** This is another very bad traditional practice. It involves giving all the privileges to the male child. Ensuring that the son gets all the attention in the family. All the inheritance rights, in some communities the “son” child is so pampered that it gets into his head, that makes him to become very lazy, looks at the sisters with a lot of disregard and sees himself at the all and all. While the girl is giving little or no attention, most times the girl’s education is neglected, and the girl is left very unkept and subjected to doing all the domestic chores while the “son” child goes about waiting for the parents to do everything for him even helping him to think. This I consider a big set back to Africa and to Nigeria in particular and therefore must be stopped. At the end of the day, the girl is pushed out for marriage she never prepared for,

discouraged, dehumanized, frustrated. Certainly this is not a good path for Nigeria and the girl child.

How can these harmful traditional practice be stopped

To stop these dangerous practices:

- (a) Government, Non-governmental Organisations, Religious bodies and spirited individuals must help in ensuring that enacted laws are duly implemented, and all those found wanting be made to face the consequences.
- (b) Conferences and seminars must be organized by NGOs, religious bodies and government at all levels to sensitize people on the dangers of these harmful traditional practices and inform them on the urgent need to stop the practices which have taken so many lives and brought untold pains and hardships to uncountable number of women and girls.
- (c) Pastors, Imams and other religious bodies, must tell their followers while preaching to stop all forms of practices considered dangerous particularly against girls and women in our society.
- (d) Traditional leaders must be very actively involved in this fight against harmful traditional practices, and they must ensure that heads of families are properly informed and made to know the penalties involved in not complying with the directives given to stop the harmful practices.
- (e) There must be grassroot campaign organized regularly in rural communities. These campaigns must be carried out in local languages where the targeted audiences can clearly get the message thereby ensuring that the enforcement reaches the people at the grassroot.
- (f) Town criers, also must be involved in the campaign and dissemination of information to the people at the grassroot. The town criers must go from quarter to quarter and possibly from door to door to ensure that every member of the community gets the information.
- (g) There should be regular meetings where traditional rulers will be meeting with their subjects to interface with them. This will give the people the privilege of speaking their minds directly before their leaders thereby ensuring that no information is suppressed or kept away from the authorities.

- (h) Rehabilitation centres should be built for those who are already victims of such dangerous practices. E.g. women having V.V.F. challenges, widows who have been subjected to very traumatic tortures and are now suffering from depression and psychological breakdown.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at various challenges confronting women and children in our society, with particular interest in exposing some of the harmful cultural practice against women and children. The paper also discussed and reviewed extensively these challenges and suggested ways these harmful practices can be stopped. It is hoped that if these suggestions can be implemented, the situation of Women will certainly get better and most of these practices considered harmful will be put under serious check.

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