OMORAGBON OSAFURE FAVOUR

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MEDICINE AND SURGERY

ASSIGNMENT. PERCIEVE A PROBLEM IN YOUR PRESENT ENVIROMENT, FORMULATE A RESEARCHABLE TOPIC FOR IT AND WRITE AN ESSAY ON IT.

Child Abuse: The Constant Maltreatment of Young Domestic Helps

 The girl lay on the cold floor of the store with only a wrapper around her to keep her warm; she always had to decide each night which was more important, to use the wrapper as a covering cloth to keep away the insects or as a sheet to keep the floor warm. She was the house girl they said and they said and they had no place for her on their beds her uncle when bringing her here told her parents she would go to school and would not grow up to be a villager, a better future he promised. On a good week she attended school three times that week and she had never attended the morning assembly though she always woke up very early. She was 12 years old now and had not seen her parents for four years and she almost couldn’t remember how they looked, she only remembered she had parents when her madam reminded her of the amount she paid to her family every month. She had decided to use the wrapper as a covering cloth this night despite the fabric irritating the new bruises she had from the beating she got from running into the house with wet clothes. She preferred the beating and bruises to the neighbour’s weird embrace; he had been looking at her strangely recently. She had to fall asleep early for the next day was a worship day and of course the family had to eat before they left in their car.

 The story of many domestic helpers in southern Nigeria comes as sad as this one and most times even worse. Domestic helpers or house helps as commonly called are supposed to be paid employees who help around the home but these days the term is now an umbrella for modern day slavery. House helps are usually children under the age of 18 usually female who live with a particular family and help out or do most of the housework and may or may not go to school. It has been clearly stated by the Nigerian government that using children for labour is illegal but many of these children are transported to the homes of their employers with the consent of their parents and usually by a relative. The children are usually told they’ll live a better life and they’ll go to school but on arrival they are given tasks that grown people are supposed to do with education forgotten and they are trapped. Most of these victims are girls and it’s not difficult to spot them from the children of the household for their appearance tells the tale. Many of these children are sourced from the north and others from the rural parts of southern Nigeria and other times from neighbouring countries like Republic of Benin and Togo. Some of these cases involve children staying with a distant relative but that has not reduced the cases of abuse. These are countless cases of physical and sexual abuse of these children within the home of their employers, emotional abuse and neglect are usually the order of the day when it comes to them. One main problem is that it is widely believed that abuse cases involving domestic workers are usually underreported for reasons such as illiteracy of the workers as many are gotten as children from rural settlements, entrapment is also a cause as in some cases many of these children can be physically confined to an area and finally financial and social standing of the abuser within society can encourage concerned citizens to look the other way in the face of this abuse.

 Child abuse and neglect is formally defined by the CDC as any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent, caregiver or another person in a custodial role that results in harm, potential to harm or threat to harm a child. Child abuse and neglect is also a preventable act. Acts of commission are deliberate and intentional although harm might have not been intended such as physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Acts of omission involve failure to provide the basic needs of a child or to prevent a child from potential harm; some examples include physical, educational, emotional and medical neglect. The problem in Nigeria is that there are so many undocumented cases and untold stories of ongoing maltreatment and full-blown abuse of these young workers. It is shocking that while we realize that they are too young to be legal workers they do in fact work and for little or no pay, most of the time for promises of education that never materialize or simply to take away another mouth to feed from a struggling family, they are children live without a parent or legal guardian and with little or no legal protection thus their owners have unchecked power when it comes to dealing with them. Although these house helps have become a staple in middleclass Nigerian families we can choose to change the way things are run and help eliminate this modern slavery from our society.

 The child right act was adopted by Nigeria in 2003, and one of its functions is to act as a legislation to prevent human trafficking, as it forbids children from being separated from their parents against their will except it’s within the best interests of the child. This law is highly violated in many homes in the southern part of the country as it is carried out by usually the upper and middle classes and in most cases the parent consent to it. The law definitely has to be properly implemented as there are currently no routine inspections of these house helps well being by any government officials and this leaves room for a lot of unethical practices by employers to children too weak to defend themselves. The government in Lagos state has stepped up though and works hand-in-hand with NGO’s to provide homes where rescued children usually rescued in the most extreme cases can be housed. In an interview on the Gudu morning Niaja show on 24th may 2020, Mr Babatunde Martin director of the public defender’s office explained that currently domestic help from children younger than 18 is illegal and although there are no current door to door searches for these children there have been cases where physical abuse of these children have been reported and the response to them. The ministry of youth and social development as well as the domestic violence and sexual response team act as first responders in these cases to rescue such children although the Nigeria police are also sometimes responders to these cases. Mr Babatunde also shared the office’s toll free line, email address and social media handles for all citizens who are witness to these or victims themselves.

 Laws passed out and ready to be properly implemented are only the first part of solving this problem as another way of helping is that only certified agencies should be permitted to link these families with needed domestic helps. There is truly a market for domestic labour and this demand has to be supplied one way or another and one means would be these agencies which would liaise with these workers, who are above a legal working age, and their families if necessary, as well as with the people in need of their services. The agency would also arrange for the pay and would inspect living conditions as well for the worker. This solution would help act as the worker’s to relate better with their employers and will help prevent unnecessary withholding of wages for personal reasons. These agencies would also serve as a union of workers with legal backing who can help resolve cases without any party feeling bullied by the other for an agreement to be reached.

 Members of society also play a role if not the biggest to stop this form of child abuse by first and foremost stopping the practice of getting underage workers from rural communities to help with housework. A child being relocated from their parents should be for the sole purpose of improving that child’s life and it should be done with consent. In the case where domestic help is needed by a family workers above 18 years should be sought personally or a good agency should be contacted. Neighbours and friends of a person can also help by reporting any sightings or suspicions of abuse to the appropriate authorities and if not responded to follow it up to ensure results. Some cases of abuse have been quickly responded to as a result of bystander intervention, such as the case of Mrs Amaka Otolehi a middle aged woman in Enugu state who was recorded on a video that went viral, violently throwing her 8-year old house help on the floor from a car. The child was brought to her by her uncle as in many cases. The video which was taken by a neighbour from a window quickly caught the attention of the police which took swift action to save the child.

 Another important step to take to eradicate the problem is to educate children formally and informally on their rights and provide them opportunities to get help if necessary. The information should be widespread to ensure that every child irrespective of background has access to help. Families in need should also be funded to ensure that they have the means to provide adequate care for the children they have to prevent them from giving their children off into modern day slavery. Stiff penalties should also be put in place for families that give off their underage children into domestic work. Domestic workers or as commonly called house helps have been a long lasting job in Nigeria especially the south and due to its informal nature, rights of workers have not really been implemented and thus it gives way for employers to act as demigods in the lives of their workers especially when they are underage, but as the world develops we realize that our society is only as great as the least of us and thus we have to play our part to ensure that this modern day adaptation of slavery is eradicated from within us.

Emergency contacts

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* Ceceyara foundation

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References

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<https://youtu.be/4a_LjH0zlPg> child abuse the use of children for house help is illegal in Lagos

<https://youtu.be/6kcKX2In0B0> CDC what are child abuse and neglect