

Sexual Exploitation of Young Women in Chika Unigwe’s On Black Sisters Street.

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Abstract

Violence against young women is a phenomenon that is widespread in many African Societies. Existing studies by literary scholars and critics suggest that violence has fundamental consequences on women as it affects them physically and emotionally. This study therefore investigated the sexual exploitation, helplessness and humiliation and mental experienced by young female characters in this novel. The study employs feminism as its theoretical framework. The findings revealed that sexually exploited victims are subjected to physical and emotional violence. The study further reveals that sexual exploitation metamorphosed into shame, regret, feelings of helplessness, worthlessness and that death is a social consequence of violence against women.

Keywords: Sexual exploitation, Helplessness, Shame, Humiliation, Worthlessness, Death

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines issues of sexual exploitation against young women in Chika Unigwe’s *On Black Sisters Street*. The paper explores the role of pimp in sexual exploitation of young women and the precursors that fuels the young women’s acceptance of being trafficked abroad for prostitution. This study also offers critical analysis of the narrative representations of how young women and girls were sexually abused in this novel. Four young women and girls who were sexually abused and trafficked are Sisi (real name is Chioma), Ama, Efe and Joyce (Alek). The novel charts the lives of these young women and girls who, hoping to escape poverty and problems in Nigeria end up as prostitutes in Antwerp, Belgium. This study therefore, elucidates on female as victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, sexual objectification of women and the emotional trauma experienced by these young women.

Background to the Study

Violence is an unjust, devastating physical and non-physical force that is unleashed upon another person with the intent to intimidate, hurt or kill. Akinnaso (15) defines it as the use of intense force, often with the aid of some weapons, to coax, threaten or fatally harm others in order to get them to surrender themselves, their property or even their lives. Similarly, Olweus et al (5) confines violence to the use of physical force. He defines it as an aggressive conduct, where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her body as an object (including a weapon) to inflict, injury or discomfort upon an individual.

Furthermore, World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation” (WHO, 2013). Similarly, United Nations (UN) defines violence as, “any act or acts that have the potential to cause harm”. From these definitions, it could be deduced that violence involves some form of force, harm towards another which could be physical; sexual or non-physical that is psychological and emotional harm (UN, 2002).

However, Violence Against Women (VAW) is any act of abuse against the female gender which results in physical, sexual, psychological and emotional harm. Marin and Felipe Russo (23) posit that VAW is a continuum of actions that encompass a wide range of negative conducts targeted against women. Moreover, many feminists define VAW as threat, coercion, abuse, intimidation or force used by men to control women (Koss, Heise and Russo, 2).

More so, it is a harm perpetrated against a woman or girl that has negative impact on their physical, sexual, psychological health which can degenerate into psychological and emotional violence. Furthermore, UN (2003) asserts that VAW is a pattern of exploitation, abuse, discrimination and harmful traditional practices such as wife battering, sexual violence, and female genital mutilation. Similarly, WHO (2013), further postulates that VAW is a grave offence and an act that does damage to persons in relationships, ranging from physical to psychological. Victims often bottle up the stress and bear the pain instead of voicing it out to enable them get help quickly. VAW has been an issue of grave concern globally. Patriarchal tendencies prevalent in society have encouraged the impunity. In the same vein, the United Nations Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (UNCSDDHA) research on VAW submits that the violence by male partners is widely condoned by many African societies because of the belief that men are superior and that the women (wives) with whom they live, are their possessions to be treated as the men consider appropriate (UNCSDDHA, 2003). It is a significant social and health problem affecting societies around the globe. It often goes unrecognised and unreported in Africa and it is accepted as normal. Adeboye (14) posits that VAW continues to stain the progress of human sociology and is found in many societies throughout history especially Nigeria. In a study by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on Nigeria and many other African countries, it was identified that the beating of wives and children is widely sanctioned as a form of discipline. Husbands believe that in beating their wives, that they are instilling discipline in them (UNICEF, 2001).

Watts and Zimmerman (37) affirms that VAW has continued for decades, universally under-reported and that globally, millions of women are experiencing violence or living with its consequences. The Guardian Newspaper of Thursday, October 25th 2018; reported that Lekan Shonde killed his wife, Ronke Shonde. He told the court during his trial that his deceased wife fell as a result of the slap, he gave her. The deceased lifeless body was discovered in their apartment by neighbours, who informed relevant authorities. Also, on 24th June 2011, most Nigerian newspaper reported that Titilayo Arowolo (now deceased), returned home early from her bank job to make her husband a big birthday dinner. However, by midnight, Titilayo was dead, brutally murdered by her husband. Autopsy report revealed she was stabbed 76 times.

Furthermore, VAW cuts across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age (Garcia-Moreno et al., 6). It is a public health and human rights issue that includes physical aggression, acid attacks, molestation, wife battering, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriages, forced prostitution, child marriages and honour killings. Common forms of violence against women in Nigeria are rape, acid attacks, molestation, wife beating and corporal punishment (Noah, 4). VAW is also associated with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and post - traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). United Nations (UN 2015), further assert that VAW is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.

In addition, Olusola (45) affirms that VAW is one of the most pervasive violated human rights in the world. He reiterated that it is a cause and consequence of gender inequality that is impacting on the health, safety, productivity and overall, well-being of women. He expressed worry over the persistence of attitudes, beliefs, practices and conduct that tend to undermine the overall welfare of the female gender. He concludes that negative stereotypes, discrimination and gender inequality are the root causes of violence against women.

More so, Heise et al. (5-9), in a review of over 50 population-based studies carried out in 35 countries found that the percentage of women reporting physical abuse by an intimate partner at some point in their lives varied between 10 to 52 percent, while those reporting sexual violence by an intimate partner ranged from 10 to 30 percent. Furthermore, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF 2015) estimated that between 20 and 50 percent of women have experienced domestic violence at some stage in their lives. The study on International Violence Against Women found that an average of 35 percent of the female population aged 16 and above had experienced violence, with between 20 to 60 percent of this population reporting at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since age of 16 (Johnson et al. 3). Also, at least 200 million women and girls aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation. The majority of these girls were from seven African countries namely Egypt, Sudan, Guinea, Djibouti, Kenya, Yemen and Nigeria and they were cut before age five (UNICEF, 2019; UN 2018).

Similarly VAW in Africa were recorded in several African novels such as Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1989); Ayobami Adebayo's *Stay With Me* (2018); Halima Bashir's *Tears of the Desert: A Memoir of Survival in Darfur* (2008); Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* (2006); Collen Lindsey's *The Rape of Sita* (re-published 2004) and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street* (2011). All these novels report that VAW is

prevalent and women do suffer exploitation, rape, discrimination, objectification, harmful traditional practices (female genital mutilation), male domination, gender inequality, sexual violence, neglect, betrayal & deceit by the male gender. More so, VAW is among the most underreported crimes worldwide and previous researchers have established that there exists a direct and significant correlation between a country's level of gender equality and rates of violence, where countries with less gender equality experience higher rates of violence (UN Women, 2010). It is also important to note that women universally experience physical assault, sexual assault, sexual harassment, psychological and emotional abuses.

VAW has continued unabated in the lives of most women. Heise et al (7) report on research undertaken concluded that at least one in three women has been beaten or coerced into sex and abused emotionally. Also, these abuses have affected the reproductive rights of victims as well as their physical and mental well-being.

Similarly, Watts and Zimmerman (3) in their book *Violence Against Women: Globe Scope and Magnitude* described severe forms of violence against women such as intimate partner violence; sexual abuse by non-intimate partners, trafficking, forced prostitution, exploitation of labour, sex selective abortion, the deliberate neglect of girls and rape in war. All these have resulted in serious stress with attendant psychological, emotional and detrimental consequences for survivors.

Synopsis of the Novel

Synopsis of Chika Unigwe's On Black Sisters Street (OBSS)

Chika unigwe is a Nigerian-born Igbo author who writes in English and Dutch. She was born in Enugu, Nigeria in 1974, the sixth of her parents' seven children. She attended secondary school in Abuja, Nigeria and obtained a BA in English in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1995. In 1996, she earned an MA degree in English from the KU Leuven Catholic University of Leuven and in 2004, she earned a Ph.D in Literature from the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. Her first novel, *De Feniks*, was published in Dutch in 2005 and is the first book of fiction written by a Flemish author of African origin. Her second novel, *Fata Morgana*, was published in Dutch in 2008 and subsequently released in English as *On Black Sisters Street*.

On Black Sisters Street won the 2012 Nigeria Prize for Literature, valued at \$100,000 it is Africa's largest literary prize. Also, in 2012 The Guardian rated Unigwe as one of the top five African writers. Still in 2012, she floored Olushola Olugbesan's *Only A Canvass* and Ngozi Achebe's Onaedo: *The Blacksmith's Daughter* to clinch the coveted \$100,000 Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas NLNG Prize for Literature, becoming the second Diaspora writer to win the prize. In 2014, she was selected for the Festival's Africa39 list of 39 sub-Saharan African writers aged under 40 with potential and talent to define future trends in Africa. Also, in 2014 Unigwe published *Black Messiah*, a novel about Olaudah Equiano. In 2016, Unigwe was appointed as the Bonderman Professor of Creative Writing at Brown University in Rhode Island. Unigwe, currently lives in the United States of America with her husband and four children.

Unigwe's first published works were collections of poems: *Tear Drops* (1993) and *Born in Nigeria* (1995). She continued writing poetry until 2005, but soon started to focus on writing fictional and non-fictional prose. Her first novel is *The Phoenix* (2007), which was written after she moved to Belgium. Although, *The Phoenix* originally published in English, the book was first published in Dutch translation. Her second and best-known novel is *On Black Sisters Street* (2009). Her third novel is *Night Dancer* (2012). Unigwe's latest novel *The Black Messiah* has currently been published only in Dutch translation.

On Black Sisters Street is about African (young women) prostitutes living and working in Belgium. This novel was set between Nigeria and Belgium and follows the lives of Ama, Sisi, Efe and Joyce. The novel opens after one of the women, Sisi, had been murdered and the story continued through flash-backs to tell the story. These young African women had left their homeland for the riches of Europe, (three Nigerians and one Sudanese) who journey from Nigeria to the red-light district of the Belgian city of Antwerp, where they work as prostitutes. These young women share an apartment. They keep their heads down, knowing that one step out of line could cost them a week's wages. They sell their bodies to strangers but their hearts to no one; rather they focus on earning enough money to get themselves free from the sexual exploitation, to send money back home and to save up for their future. Then suddenly, one of them, Sisi (the rebel among them) is mysteriously murdered (251).

The person who brought these women together is Dele (sex trafficker) a supposedly "big man" in Lagos whose wealth comes from selling African women to Western European brothels. Dele charged these women 30,000 euros (32), a debt they would have to repay along with madam's (landlady) accommodation money. The novel dwells on the scourge of human trafficking.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Feminism Theory as its theoretical framework. Feminism seeks to achieve a world where men and women have equal rights and opportunities. It promotes the ideology of equality of the sexes. Craig (1-7) posits that feminism is the belief that women and men are equal and should be valued equally and

have equal rights. Feminism is concerned with women and their experiences. It is also concerned with the emancipation of women and girls from all forms of discrimination and oppression. It is an advocacy that focuses on women's issues, their rights and emancipation from patriarchal social structure. It seeks to eradicate all forms of oppression that women face in today's world. It is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of equality. Feminists want women to be treated equally and fairly alongside the menfolk. They seek to reduce the harmful impact of gender roles that society enforces on women and the stereotypes that are attached to them. These stereotypes are the reasons majority of women have experienced sexual violence, degradation, discrimination, subjugation and why suicide is a leading outcome for abused women. Therefore, feminism seeks to obtain equal rights, privileges and opportunities with a view to ensuring that women receive all the support and empowerment; they need to bring out the good in them and to achieve whatever they want. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification, oppression, patriarchy, stereotyping.

Furthermore, feminism is a movement that champions the cause of women. It seeks equal rights and opportunities for women. Feminists focus on themes like female harassment, oppression, inequality between the sexes, sexuality, domestic violence, reproductive rights, male chauvinism, discrimination and objectification of women and girls.

According to Fox- Genovese (29), in her essay "Placing Women's History in History", she argues that feminism places women at the centre of history by recognising their peculiar roles and contribution in the shaping of history. Steady (57), a Professor of African Studies opines that feminism addresses the issues that affect the African women and the efforts they make in liberating themselves. In her article 'African feminism' published in 2005, she reiterated that African feminism finds expression in activism for social, economic and humanistic transformation through women's associations. According to her, these associations seek to empower women by promoting economic, political and legal participation, female education and general well-being of women.

Similarly, Sotunsa (8) in her book *Feminism and Gender Discourse*; "Feminism's major aim is to combat female oppression and repression in all forms". Feminism seeks to obtain equal rights, privileges and opportunities for women. It revolves around women experiences and believes that life would be better for women without sexism holding them back. In addition, feminism is rejecting all inequalities and injustice against women. It is recognising the human rights of women and also, being against everything and anything that stands to denigrate womanhood or discriminate against women and girls.

Types of Violence Against Young Women as Recorded in the Novel: Sexual Exploitation

The vast majority of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are young women and girls (females). Sexual exploitation is the sexual abuse of a victim from a position of vulnerability by another who is in power for the purpose of profiting in cash or kind. It occurs when a position of power is used for sexual purposes against a vulnerable member of the society. It entails forcing, cajoling or using undue influence on a vulnerable person to coerce them into prostitution or pornography. Traffickers usually target them due to their vulnerability. These young women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation are subjected to abuse both physical, emotional and psychological abuse and they are at risk of developing various ailments including Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), develop gynecological issues and mental illness.

In this novel *On Black Sisters Street*, four young women were sexually exploited in Antwerp, Belgium. They were trafficked to Belgium for the sole purpose of sexual exploitation. The pimp Dele takes advantage of their vulnerability (under the guise of taking them abroad) to introduce them into sexual slavery. The narrator says:

When a man with a protuberant stomach walked in with a young girl who could not have been older than seventeen. It was obvious from the way he held her with his left hand, casually touching her buttocks, that there was nothing innocent about their relationship. Oya! Make am beautiful. She dey go abroad. Today! Beautify am. The young girl – all bones mainly, except for a humongous pair of breasts – was quiet. (OBSS: 29).

The narrator has given a description of Dele and how he arranges young girls by taking them abroad for sexual exploitation and the girls have to pay him installmentally when they begin prostitution abroad. Dele, himself confirmed the above when he tried to brainwash Chisom into accepting to go abroad. Dele describes it as follows:

I dey get girls everywhere. Italy. Spain. I fit get you inside Belgium. Antwerp. I get plenty connections there. Plenty, plenty! But I no dey do charity o. So it go cost you. Taty t'ousand euro it go cost you o. Na when you get there, Begin work, you go begin dey pay. Installmental payment, We dey call am. Mont' by mont' you go dey pay me. (OBSS: 32).

Dele offered explanation to make an already bad proposal look good. He gave the girls the impression that by paying in installments, that the yoke would be easy. The traffickers earned a profit from the sexual

exploitation of these girls therefore they try to increase the number of girls trafficked monthly. Dele explained it as follows:

Every month you go pay five hundred euros. Or any amount you get, minimum of a hundred, without fail. Any failure would result in unpleasantness, he warned. No try cross me o. Nobody dey cross Senghor Dele. You work hard and five hundred euros every month no go hard for you to pay. Every month I send gals to Europe. Antwerp. Milan. Madrid. My gals dey there. Every month, four gals. Sometimes five or more. You be fine gal now. Abi, see your backside, kai! Who talk say na dat Jennifer Lopez get the finest nyansh? Make dem come here, come see your assets! As for those melons wey you carry for ches, omo, how you no go fin' work?

He fixed his eyes, beady and moist and greedy on her breasts. You fit sleep on it. No need to decide now. But I swear, with your melons, you go dey mint money anyhow! (OBSS: 39-40).

From the above quote, it is clear that the young women are exploited by Dele and Madam. They were made to work as prostitutes in an environment where they have little or nothing to say. They were trafficked abroad in the name of giving them a better life.

Sexual objectification of women

Sexual objectification is the treatment of women as sexual objects, to be valued only for the sexual satisfaction of men. Fredrickson and Roberts (4-7) postulate that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others. In this novel, these young women who were trafficked and sexually exploited remain an object. When Sisi arrived Antwerp, madam had told her to go and apply for asylum without explaining why she had to do so. However, the request was turned down and when she returned to brief her, madam further objectified her. The narrator captured it as follows:

They said no. No asylum for me. She fished in her handbag for the paper they had given her and gave that to Madam as she repeated herself. They said no. She looked up at Sisi and, as if she had read Sisi's mind, said, This paper is no concern of yours. All you need to know is that you're a persona non grata in this country. And you do not exist. Not here. Now you belong to me. It cost us a lot of money to organize all this for you. Until you have paid up every single kobo – every single cent of what you owe us, you shall not have your passport back. Every month we expect five hundred Euros from you. That should be easy to do if you are dedicated. But I understand that sometimes you may not be able to, so we have set a minimum repayment of one hundred euros. Every month you go to western Union and transfer the money to Dele. Any month you do not pay up.. she let the threat hang, unspoken yet menacing. Suddenly, she reached behind her and threw the bag at Sisi. Here. Your work clothes. Tonight, you start. With a flick of her right hand, Sisi was duly dismissed. (OBSS: 155-157).

From the above quote, it is obvious that Sisi was being turned into an object. An object to be used as desired by madam. She was to pay back five hundred euros monthly, otherwise there would be grave consequences. Nobody cared what happened to Sisi and the other young women who were being sexually exploited. All Madam cares about was to ensure that Dele gets his monthly installments at payment while madam (she provides accommodation for the girls in Antwerp) only cared about her rent and security of the business. Therefore, when Sisi was murdered and she informed the others about her death, she (madam) carried on with her normal everyday business as if Sisi was merely an object. The narrator says:

Nobody says it, but they are all aware that the fact that Madam is going about her normal business, no matter what they are, is upsetting them. There is bitterness at the realization that for her, Sisi's death is nothing more than a temporary discomfort. They watched her eat a hearty breakfast, toast and eggs chewed with gusto and washed down with a huge mug of tea, and thought her appetite, her calm, tactless. Joyce thinks: When she told them of the death, she did not even have the decency to assume the sad face that the gravity of the news demanded. She did not try to soften the blow – did not couch the news in a long story about death was a must, an escape, an entry into a better world – the proper way to do it. No. She just told of the discovery of the body. And: The police might want to talk to you, but I shall try and stop it. I don't want anything spoiling business for us. (OBSS: 37).

From the quote, it was obvious that the young women are just objects. Objects, that are to be used and discarded. Madam and Dele were more concerned about the money to be made from the sexual exploitation of the girls than the wellbeing of the young women; thereby turning them into mere objects.

Furthermore, Sisi (Chisom) explained that the taxi driver that took her to the airport was concerned about his son's education but cared-less about his daughters' education. His daughters went to a government school that he described as "Cheap but rubbish" (43). The taxi driver lamented that he had no money to send his son to a good school. Sisi narrates it as follows:

My body is sharp. He is sharp, and I want him to go to school, but how? I can't pay his school fees with my spittle. His other children, all girls, went to the Government school close to his house. Cheap but

rubbish. That school is not good enough for my son. At all! He was breaking his back driving round the clock, because a son deserved the best. (OBSS: 43).

From the above quote, it is obvious that women and girls were held in low esteem. The taxi driver does not believe that his daughters also ought to go to good schools. He believed that only the boy-child deserved the best education. This is another way to objectify the girl-child.

Emotional Trauma

Emotional trauma is what an individual experiences within them, as a result of extraordinary stressful events that shatter their sense of security, making them helpless, afraid, confused, and full of anxiety. The sudden and unexpected demise of Sisi dealt a heavy blow on the young women. It was really traumatizing for the young women. It caused anger, anxiety and brought a great deal of confusion to their lives in Antwerp. It also brought a lot of unanswered questions. The young women had been brought together into prostitution by the unscrupulous, greedy, dangerous Dele and the unconscientious and abominable madam who act as pimps over the young women but know little or nothing of one-another. Therefore, when Sisi died, they were really confused and traumatized without knowing what to do. The narrator explained it as follows:

What do we do now? Joyce mocks. She shakes her head and rolls her eyes up to the ceiling. What can we do, Efe? What on earth can we do? You know her people? Who would you send the body to? And even if you know her people, can you afford to pay for her body to be sent back to Nigeria? What can any of us do? What? Have the police even released the body? What do we do now, indeed? (OBSS: 36).

From the above, it is obvious that the young women were confused, helpless, angry and full of anxiety. They did not know what to do about Sisi's death. They were really traumatized. Furthermore, the young women were sad and unhappy because they fear that the same fate may befall them. The narrator says:

Everybody is lost in her own thoughts. Sisi's death brings their own mortality close to them. The same questions go through their heads, speech bubbles rising in front of each of them. Who is going to die next? To lie like a sheet of paper unnoticed on the floor. Unmourned. Unloved. Unknown. Who would be the next ghost Madam would try to keep away? With the power of her incense? (OBSS: 36-37).

Above quote further shows the state of mind of these young women who were thoroughly traumatized and unhappy about the state of things.

Nature of Sexual Exploitation against Women in Unigwe Chika's On Black Sisters Street (OBSS)

The nature of violence in OBSS is psychological and emotional. The young women in this novel were trafficked for sexual exploitation. They were transported across national border for the sole purpose of sexually exploiting them in circumstances that victimizes them both sexually and psychologically. They were trafficked abroad where they were entrapped and swindled to engage in prostitution. The nature of violence against Sisi in this novel was that she was murdered by Dele (the pimp) through his hammer-man Segun who murdered her with a hammer. Furthermore, Ama was raped repeatedly by her step-father at a tender age of eight years. Though, she reported the incidences to her mother who did not believe her but rather sent her packing from the house, to go live with an aunty, where she eventually met Dele. Efe was sexually violated, deceived, used and duped. She was impregnated at age sixteen by Titus, a married man, who abandoned her as soon as she informed him of the pregnancy. Joyce (Alek) was gang-raped by militias in her homeland Sudan. She eventually returned to Nigeria with her lover who also abandoned her and led her to Dele (the pimp) who eventually orchestrated her going to Antwerp for prostitution. These young women in this novel suffered psychological and emotional violence due to the fact that they were sexually exploited, thrown into prostitution under harsh and unfavourable conditions and one of them paid the supreme price with her life – she died. They were therefore unhappy, helpless, anxious, stressed and depressed.

Precursors to the Behaviours Portrayed by Sexual Exploitation Victims

Trafficked females are usually vulnerable and marginalized women and girls who are emotionally distressed, women and girls from extreme poor homes, those who have been sexually abused in their childhoods, women and girls in war-torn environments, women and girls who have no jobs or out of employment and those in areas where extreme gender discrimination prevails. Many victims are targeted, lured or chosen as a victim because of their vulnerability and disempowerment. Therefore, poverty is a major factor that triggers the act of violence in the text.

In this novel (OBSS), the four young women who are victims had precursors that acted as justification for why they agreed to be trafficked. For each of the young women, it was not an easy decision. Victims only agreed because they erroneously thought that their lives would be better.. Sisi, for instance is from a poor home. Though she was a graduate but she had no job. So, for many young women and girls like her, poverty creates despair. More so, vulnerable women and girls seek opportunities to improve their circumstances. Therefore, the

precursors for all the victims are their failed dreams. Sisi narrates the battle that went through her mind when Dele brain-washed her into being trafficked abroad for sexual exploitation. The narrator says:

When his words sank in, she expected to be furious. To ask him what type of girl he thought she was. To say, Do you know I have a university degree? Do you know I am a graduate? She expected that her anger would give her the courage to slap his fat face. Instead, images flashed in front of her like pictures from a TV show: the living room with the pap-colored walls. A shared toilet with a cistern that never contained water; anyone wishing to use the latrine had to first of all fetch a bucket of water from the tap in the middle of the compound. Her father folded, trying to be invisible. Her mother's vacant eyes interested in nothing. She imagined her life, one year from now, if she stayed in Lagos. But could she really resort to that? She was not that sort of girl. She turned to go, but her feet stuck in the quicksand. They would not move. (OBSS:40).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the need to conquer poverty was a driving force for Sisi. She wanted economic freedom for her family and she also wanted to live a good life which she was certain to get abroad. Therefore, she agreed to be trafficked abroad for sexual exploitation in supposedly exchange for wealth. Furthermore, Sisi was convinced, she had to act fast to save her parents from seemingly impending doom as the only child of the family. The narrator describes the situation as follows: The narrator says:

He could never buy a car. He could never buy a decent house. He could never earn enough to fulfill his dreams. His predicament weighed on his shoulders and resulted in a stoop that belied his forty-something years. He walked like a man in his eighties, shuffling, head bent, perpetually searching for the dot on the ground that would either signal a change in his fortune or widen and eat him up whole, obliterating him from the earth. He never looked people in the face when he spoke, raising his head only a few inches, so that mostly people had to ask him to repeat himself. (OBSS: 78).

The precursor event that led to Ama's acceptance to being trafficked abroad was her childhood sexual violations by her step-father who claimed to be a pastor. Everyone called him Brother Cyril because he was a Christian and belonged to a church where everyone was "Sister" and "Brother". Brother Cyril acted like a saint always and introduced his wife as "my Rose whom I married a virgin" (112). However, in spite of Brother Cyril's deceit that he was a pastor, he raped his step-daughter on her eight birthday and thereafter raped her repeatedly. He also threatened her not to report to her mother or anyone-else, therefore Ama began to speak to the walls in her room. The narrator described it as follows:

After Ama had blown out the candles on the cake and the cake had been eaten and the clown had made the children laugh and the cameraman had captured all the joy and laughter on video, after the guests had gone and Ama had been sent to bed certain that this was the happiest day of her entire life, her father floated into her dark room in his white safari suit. Ama thought he was a ghost and would have screamed if he had not preempted her by covering her mouth with one broad palm and smothering the scream in her throat. With the other hand, he fumbled under her nightdress, a cotton lavender gown with the print of a huge grinning bear. That was the first time it happened. The next night he floated into her room again. Ama told the walls how he held her nipple between his fingers and squeezed. Over the next days the walls heard how he ignored her when she said that he was hurting her inside. They heard of how she tried to push him away when he lay on top of her, but he was a mountain and she did not have the strength in her to move a mountain. She told of the grunting and the sticky whiteness like pap that gushed out of him. It's warm and yucky, she complained to her walls. I'll never eat pap again. (OBSS: 113).

From the above quote, it is obvious that the precursor event of child sexual violation was the humiliation that eroded her confidence in family life and in the midst of her sadness, worry, anxiety and frustration, she yearned to travel abroad. The narrator says:

Ama told the walls she wanted to go abroad. When she slept, she saw herself, hair long and silky, in a city very far away, where her father's whiteness did not stifle her. No one she knew had been abroad, but every night when she prayed, she asked God for a miracle, whispering her prayer furiously, hoping it bypassed her father's ears and the pastor's ears, that it pierced heaven to land gently beside God's right ear. She wanted to go to London. She has seen pictures of London Bridge on TV. (OBSS: 115).

The precursor event for Efe that led her into sexual exploitation in Antwerp was her mother's sudden demise and the sexual abuse by Titus. Efe's mother died suddenly and being the eldest daughter, Efe had to leave school to cater for her siblings and father who completely lost himself after his wife's death. The narrator says:

He would have remained strong enough for them, and Efe would not have had to quit school to look after the family. She missed her classmates, whom she no longer saw because other responsibilities had taken over and made her a lot older than they were, so that on those occasions when she did bump into them she felt embarrassed for reasons she could not explain. She missed the smell of new books at the beginning of new term. (OBSS: 49).

From the quote, Efe's mother's death and the added responsibility of taking care of the family made her to quit going to school. Furthermore, Titus took advantage of her innocence and naivety to sexually abuse her. The narrator describes it as follows:

Efe discovered sex at sixteen behind her father's house. That first experience was so painful in its ordinariness that she had spent days wanting to cry. She'd had no notion of what to expect, yet she had not thought it would be this lackluster, this painful nothing. She remembers nothing but a wish that it would not last too long and that the pain between her legs would be very well compensated. The man who held her buttocks tight and swayed and moaned and was responsible for all the pain was forty-five. He was old. Experienced. But, most important, he had money that was rumored to be endless. Money wey full everywhere like san-san. He had promised Efe new clothes. New shoes. Heaven. Earth. And everything else she fancied between the two as long as she let him have his way. (OBSS: 45).

From the quote, it is obvious that Titus took advantage of Efe and sexually molested her with the promise of financial reward. Every night for the next four months, Efe saw Titus at his insistence (50) However, in-no-time, Efe got pregnant and the night she told Titus she was sure she was pregnant was the last time, day or night, that he turned up for their daily appointment (52). The narrator explained it as follows:

He had been lying in bed, stroking her shoulders. I am pregnant, Titus. That was all it took to get him out of that bed, get him dressed, - first the black trousers with the cord pulled tightly under his stomach and then the caftan reaching to his knees. Then he got up, turned his broad back to her, picked up his car Key from the bedside table, and walked out of the hotel room, Closing the door so gently that it made no noise. (OBSS: 52).

From the quote, it was clear that Titus was not interested in the unborn baby and was only really interested in Efe's body. He, (Titus) viewed her as , a sexual object, that was only good enough to satisfy his

sexual urge. Therefore, haven been abandoned by Titus, Efe literarily went-through-hell before and after delivery of the baby. This is because Titus stopped seeing Efe, stopped giving her money for herself and the unborn baby. This incident was a big blow to Efe who became very unhappy, sad, depressed and had to take on multiple manual jobs (67) to cater for her needs and that of the baby. Dele, the pimp who trafficked her abroad for sexual exploitation was one of her bosses. The narrator explained it as follows:

But try as she might, Dele never asked her out, and it was not until seven months later, when she started to complain about finding a good nursery for L.I. so that Rita could go back to school, that Dele asked if she would like to go abroad. Belgium. A country wey dey Europe. Next door to London. Had he not started talking seriously about payment, an installment plan to repay the debt, of her sharing a house with other Nigerian women being looked after by a friend of his, she would not have believed that he had not asked her the question in jest. She had agreed to Dele's terms before she asked what she was expected to do abroad. Clean? To which Dele laughed and said, No. Sales. She would be Dele and Sons Limited's export. L.I. would get a better life. Go to good schools, become a big shot, and look after her when she was old and tired. L.I. was a worthy enough investment to encourage her to accept Dele's offer. And even though leaving him would be the hardest thing she would ever do, she would endure it for his sake. (OBSS: 71).

From the quote, it is clear that the precursor to the behaviour was sexual abuse by Titus who sexually abused her severally and duped her when she became pregnant. And in order to meet her needs and that of the child, she agreed to a greater sexual exploitation when she agreed to be trafficked abroad.

Furthermore, for the character Joyce (real name Alek)'s, precursors to the behaviour portrayed when she accepted to be trafficked were hopelessness, helplessness and the traumatic incidences of war in her home country, South Sudan. Their home had been raided, her parents and her brother had been killed and she had been beaten, molested and gang raped by the Janjaweed militias. The narrator says:

Where are they? Where are the rebels? Bring them out! A kick against the cupboard door. Alek held her breath. She reached out for her brother. His hand, slithery with sweat, slipped. There is nobody here, sir, just my wife and me. Maybe, just maybe, it would sway the minds of the intruders. Alek prayed. The soldiers wanted to ransack the room. To check every bit of it. Under the bed! The cupboard! The drawers! Between the books! Please, please, spare us. Please sir... Begun but not finished. A shot amputating the rest of his sentence. A stillness. Her mother's wails replayed in her head. She scurried out from the cupboard. Her parents' bodies were sprawled on the ground. The soldiers looked at her. Breasts like baby mangoes straining against her flowered dress. One of the soldiers smiled. Grabbed her breasts. He tore my dress. I fought, but he tore my dress. And. And. And threw me on the bed. She tried to bite him. He felt her teeth graze his arm and slapped her. It catapulted her brother from his hiding place. A soldier aimed his gun at him and shot. Lifted him off his feet. Landed him with a whack on the floor. He did not make a sound. Not before. And not after. When he thrust his manhood inside her, when he touched her, Alek felt a grief so incomprehensible that she could not articulate it beyond chanting. This is not happening... This is not happening... One by one the other men thrust themselves into her, pulling out to come on her face. Telling her to ingest it, it was protein. (OBSS: 161-163).

From the foregoing, the narrator gave vivid description of the horrors, terror, revulsion and trauma that Joyce (then Alek) had to ensure in the face of the brutal killings of her immediate family and her gang-rape by the militias. Afterwards, Joyce went to the United Nations Refugee Camp which became her new home, where unlike Ama who speaks to the walls; Joyce speaks with the stars and have conversation with her family. This is where she met Polycarp, a Nigerian soldier among the African Union Peacekeepers; who fell in love with her and eventually took her along with him upon his return to Nigeria. Polycarp's relationship with Joyce was not approved by Polycarp's family, being the eldest son, the expectation was for him to marry a fellow Igbo lady like himself and not marry a foreigner like Joyce. Polycarp, later took Joyce to meet with Dele (the pimp) who told her a lie that she was to be taken to Belgium where she would find work as a nanny. She ended up joining the others in Antwerp with madam orchestrating the sexual exploitation. The narrator explains it as follows:

Oga Dele, this is Alek. I told you already about her. The name has to go. Alek. Sound too much like Alex. Man's name. We no wan' men. Oti oo. That man's name has to go, one time. Give am woman name. Fine fine name for fine gal like her. He laughter and Polycarp laughter. Alek hated them both. Make I see.... Cecilia?

Nicole? Joyce? Yes Joyce. Yes. Joyce. Dat one sound like name wey dey always jolly. Yes, yes, Senghor Dele.

Joyce is a much better name. (OBSS: 196-197).

From the quote, it is obvious that Polycarp betrayed their love for each other. Also Dele and Polycarp turned her into an object. She became an object before these two men who mocked throughout their conversation by laughing and turning her into an object by changing her name, right under her nose without seeking her involvement or explaining the reason for such change. A Nigerian passport was later issued in the new name, given to her by Dele and Polycarp thereby objectifying her. Furthermore, when she arrived Antwerp, she joined other young women who were also being sexually violated. The narrator says:

Madam had given her two days of grace. And then she had to start. Start what? Earning your keep. Oya, time to open shop! Time to work! Chop! Chop! A laughter-dancing Madam bullied her out of the house, into the car, and to the Schipperskwartier. No passport. No money. What was she to do? (OBSS: 199-200).

Therefore, for Joyce (Alek), the precursor for her in joining the sexual slavery in Antwerp was the hopelessness, the helplessness, the trauma of losing her entire family in one day before her eyes, her gang-rape by the Janjaweed militias and the betrayal by Polycarp, the man she fell in love with.

4.7 Psychological and Social Consequences of Sexual Violence Against Women in Unigwe Chika's *On Black Sisters Street* (OBSS)

The psychological and social consequences of sexual violence against women are discussed in this section. The psychological consequences of violence against women in this novel resulted in feelings of helplessness, worthlessness, depression, anxiety, and hopelessness while the social consequences of sexual violence in this novel resulted in isolation, change in world-view, stigma and discrimination, and death.

Psychological Consequences of Sexual Violence Against Women in *On Black Sisters Street* (OBSS)

The psychological consequences of sexual violence against women in this novel stem from the fact that the young women were unhappy, helpless and depressed about the sexual violation and abuse by the various sexual exploitations that they live with. They were generally not happy about their situations which brought a great deal of ill-feelings. Ama was unhappy and helpless following her rape by her step-father when she was as young as eight years old and when she reported to her mother, her mother did not even believe her. Joyce (Alek) was gang-raped in her homeland Sudan. She later moved to Nigeria with her lover who also betrayed her by colluding with a pimp Dele who trafficked her to Antwerp for prostitution. Efe was impregnated by a married man at a tender age who abandoned her when she informed him that she was pregnant for him. She later agreed to be trafficked for prostitution to earn money to give her son a good life. Sisi was a graduate who agreed to be trafficked for prostitution because she couldn't get a job after graduation and life was turning to a nightmare from impoverishment .. Her parents could not make ends meet. Therefore, she agreed to be trafficked to improve the standard of living for her immediate family. Sisi was later murdered in Antwerp by Dele because he felt betrayed. The psychological consequences of sexual violence in this novel would be discussed from the young women's feelings of helplessness, worthlessness and depression.

Helplessness

Helplessness is the state of being incapacitated, powerless and inability to cope with certain stressful situation. It is synonymous to weakness, powerlessness and vulnerability. Helplessness could connote a state of fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, trauma and contempt. It is a negative emotional feeling that persists through repeated stressful experiences. In this novel, these young women were helpless. They had no power to conquer their oppressors who abused them and took advantage of them. It refers to the perception that one is powerless

to change an undesirable situation. The narrator explained that after the death of Sisi, the young women were unhappy, angry, helpless and in a state of shock. The narrator says:

When she told them of the death, she did not even have the decency to assume the sad face that the gravity of the news demanded. No. She just told of the discovery of the body. When she added, another one bites the dust, in a voice that she might have used to talk about the death of a dog or a cockroach, Joyce felt the urge to slap her. Or to stuff her mouth with dust until she begged for mercy. But Joyce did neither. She could not. Instead, she tensed her muscles and bit into her cheeks until she drew blood. Her helplessness, desolate in its totality. (OBSS: 37).

From the quote, it is obvious that the young women were really helpless and unhappy about their situation.

Worthlessness

Worthlessness is the state of being unimportant and useless. It is a feeling of being without value or worth. Feelings of worthlessness may develop into a prolonged state of negative mood and may also be related to other feelings, including hopelessness, guilt, persistent sadness, or loss of motivation. After Sisi arrived Antwerp, Madam told her to hand-over her passport and go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Sisi had asked her why she should go to the Ministry. She then made Sisi understand that she cannot ask questions but rather do as she (Madam) says: The narrator explained it further as follows:

Ah, hand over your passport. From now until your debt is paid, I am in charge of your passport. She got up, knelt, and dragged her suitcase out from under the bed. She unzipped an inner pocket and brought out the envelope with her passport. She handed the brown envelope to Madam. Once you've eaten breakfast, you have to go and register at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Why? The question was out before Sisi could stop it. Why? Madam echoed, her voice mocking and lilted by a laugh. My dear... What's your name? Sisi. My dear Sisi, it's not your place to ask questions here. You just do as you are told, and you'll have an easy ride. I talk, you listen. You understand? Three days ago, I gave Joyce the same instructions. She did not ask me questions. She just listened and did as she was told. I expect the same of you. Silence and total obedience. That's the rule of the house. Be seen, not heard. Capisce. (OBSS: 103).

From the quote, it is clear that Sisi and the other young girls were worthless and of no value to Madam. Madam do not care about their feeling or issues about them. All she cares about is the money that they made for her and Dele through prostitution.

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that causes feelings of sadness, pessimism, sleeplessness and loss of interest. Iyer and Khan (3-7) describe depression as a mood disorder characterized by a sense of inadequacy, despondency, decreased activity, pessimism and sadness. These young women who were trafficked for prostitution often times became sad and depressed. And in such instances, they begin to reflect on their situation which resulted to tears of pain. . In one of those instances, Joyce (Alek) began to reflect and began to cry. The narrator says:

JOYCE IS CRYING, AND IT IS THE FIRST TIME THE WOMEN HAVE EVER seen her cry. They do nothing. They are on unknown territory, having always had a relationship that skimmed the surface like milk. They have never stirred one another enough to find out anything deep. Joyce's tears take even her by surprise, and she hurriedly wipes them away with the back of her hand. But that does not stop the flow. She pulls her legs up to the sofa, her knees under her chin. She looks like a giant fetus. Her snot mingles with her tears. She wipes her nose on her sleeve. For a while her sniffing fills the room, a cavernous sound that devours everything, even the silence. Ama sighs and then puts a hand out and touches Joyce on her cheek. It is a warm touch, and Alek smiles through Joyce's tears. And then the sniffing tapers and completely dies. (OBSS: 205).

From the quote, it is obvious that the young women feel depressed about their situation and often find themselves crying at a remembered past. (209).

Social Consequences of Sexual Violence Against Women in *On Black Sisters Street* (OBSS)

Social consequences are the effect of an action (or inaction), on family members and community members. Social consequences of sexual violence against women stem from the fact that survivors often experience rejection, discrimination, stigmatization, isolation, family separation, stigma from peer groups, suicidal ideation and death. According to Esere et al. (7-8), social consequences of sexual violence could also result to total withdrawal, social exclusion, self-isolation, difficulty for the victim to get married, suffering in silence, family separation, erosion of confidence and self-esteem, and could lead to inferiority complex. The social consequences identified in this novel include family separation, shame, regret, and death.

Family Separation

Family is a group of people who share common ancestors. That is a social group of people made up of parents, children aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. Horton and Hunt (191) posit that family is as a kinship grouping which provides for the rearing of children and for certain other human needs. Family separation occurs when parents are separated from their children at a tender age for reasons bothering on circumstances beyond their control. Family separation is traumatic for both parents and children. Such children display low self-esteem, mood disorder including anxiety and depression. Parents suffer from anxiety, worry, helplessness and emotional turmoil. For instance, Efe, who had a child out of wed lock suffered many turmoils which were, worsened by a Titus who refused to take responsibility for the child had to take on multiple cleaning jobs to provide for her son. The narrator says:

Efe was still determined to provide her son with the kind of life she had dreamed for him when she thought she would be able to get Titus's help. Every morning before she went to her cleaning job at an office in GRA, she whispered in her son's ear so that only he could hear, I promise you, I shall get you out of here. I don't care how I do it. Everybody called the baby L.I., the initials of his name. L.I. grew and his mother worked to provide for him, cleaning first one office and then a second. Left in the care of her sister Rita, Efe did not see enough of him (OBSS: 66-67).

Efe was to be further separated from her son L.I. when he had to leave the young boy at infancy to travel to Belgium for prostitution to earn enough money to enable her give him a better life. However, the narrator says that Efe was worried about not being a part of the son's life. She was worried that L.I. would not see her as his mother. The narrator explained it as follows:

Efe says she wishes she could see L.I. She says that when she talks to him on the phone it's like talking to a stranger, and that bothers her. He's polite and all, but I always feel like he wants to get off the phone, that he'd much rather be somewhere else. She says that she is worried that L.I. does not see her as his mother. (OBSS: 81).

Just as she feared, she eventually became a stranger to her son after spending thirteen years in Antwerp. Her son grew up knowing only his aunt Rita as the mother, that was always available to care for him. The narrator says:

In fact, in the thirteen years Efe would be abroad, Rita would become such a mother to L.I. that whatever memories he had of Efe would be replaced by those of the rounder Rita. Rita would let him sit beside her as she cooked. She would take him along with her when she went to the market. When he got taunted by the neighborhood children who called him a bastard, it was Rita who comforted him and told him he was no bastard, he was a child whose father was dead. And when L.I. started school and his teachers asked for his mother, Rita would be the one to go, asking how he was doing at school, was he well behaved? (OBSS: 73-74).

From the quote, it is clear that social consequences of sexual violation are huge, also having long term negative consequences Titus, the father of L.I. continued refusing to take on his responsibility as a father leaving the mother, Efe with no choice but to continue engaging in her regrettable job which has resulted in widening the gap between she and her son for life.

Shame and Regret

One of the social consequences of violence against women was shame and regret. After settling down in Antwerp for the prostitution work, the young women began to regret their decision. Sisi, particularly became ashamed of herself and began to regret her decision. However, when she went to work, she kept smiling, giving the impression that all was well. However, she was unhappy with herself for having agreed to be trafficked. The narrator says:

On that Wednesday night, Sisi had been in Antwerp for exactly five and a half months. The revelation displaced her enthusiasm to make money. In its place came a stoicism she could never have imagined she possessed. She went to work and her smile stayed on. She greeted her clients and it did not falter. She thanked them when they tipped her. When they complimented her. When they said she was not like a lot of black prostitutes who tried to wrangle more money than was originally agreed upon. The smile stayed on. But an unhappiness permeated her skin and wound itself around her neck and forced her head down so that she walked as if something shamed her. While she had never been comfortable in her job, there was now a certain aversion added to the discomfort. She could no longer bear to look at herself, not even when she was alone. When she took a bath, she sponged her body without once looking at it. Regrets assailed her day in, day out. She smiled, but behind that smile her regret grew bigger and bigger, its shadow casting a pall over her. (OBSS: 212).

From the quote above, it is clear that Sisi's regret was increasing by the day. She was ashamed and constantly wished she could leave the prostitution life and live a normal life. And then she met Luc, a young white guy, a banker whom she met at the African church. They fell in love and she had to open up to Luc and confided in him. Luc encouraged her to quit the job and marry him. And advised her to report to the police to

put Dele and Madam off her back (232). Unknown to her, Segun, the hammer man, who lived with them in the house and did side tables and other related repair had been detailed by Dele and Madam to murder any of the young women who dared betray them. Therefore, on that faithful day when she was murdered, she had left the house at Zwartzusterstraat, (where she lives with the other girls), for Luc house. And at Luc house, Segun, suddenly showed up and told her that they needed to discuss briefly in his car. She had agreed to join Segun in his car because she thought that Segun could not harm her, but Sisi was wrong. The narrator explained as follows:

Death

In this novel, one of the social consequences of violence against women and girls is death. It is a social consequence resulting from the pimp feeling betrayed. The narrator explained that Sisi had gotten disenchanted with the sexual exploitation work, had left the house without telling the other girls about her whereabouts. However, little did she know that Segun (the hammer man) was keeping tab on her and had been detailed to kill anyone of the girls who reengaged on the payment agreement. The narrator explained how Sisi was killed as follows:

When Sisi answered and found Segun at the door, it had her surprised but not alarmed. Hello, do you want to come in, Segun? He did not want to, But ... Bu...but I want you to come, I mean ...to – to co...to come with me in the car. We, we, we, I mean, to discuss. Discuss, ke? We can discuss it here, She told the lanky man. No. I am sorry, Si...si. Not here. No...no...I mean not here. It, it, it, I mean ..it wo – wo... won't take time, I promise. She got into the car. Whatever it was he had to discuss, she hoped he would keep it short. Segun, I can't stay out too long. He nodded. She was not scared of Segun. He was harmless, everyone knew it. So the hammer hitting into her skull had come as a shock. She had not even had time to shout. She was not yet dead when he dragged her out on the deserted road leading to the GB and pushed her into the trunk of the car, heaping her on top of a purple-and-gray plaid blanket, her ankle-length green dress riding high up her legs to expose her thighs. One of her leaf-green flat-heeled slippers fell off, and Segun picked it up and threw it nonchalantly into the trunk. It landed beside Sisi's head. (OBSS:250-251).

From the quote, Sisi had been murdered by Dele through his hammer-man Segun. She had been killed because Dele felt betrayed that Sisi had deviated from the agreement and the cost of betrayal is death. Sisi paid the ultimate price of death.

II. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes as follows.

Violence against women is real and young women experience sexual exploitation, sexual objectification, family separation, emotional trauma as demonstrated in the novel. More so, women and girls were sexually exploited, raped, gang-raped and trafficked by men and fellow women who are supposed to protect them. The consequences of this violence against women are enormous and there are more non-physical consequences (psychological and emotional) than are physical consequences, as analysed in the novel. The study revealed that women and girls are victims of psychological and emotional abuse and that these situations lead to a host of mental ill health conditions such as shame, regret, helplessness, worthlessness which metamorphose into depression, suicidal ideation amongst others.

The study concludes that violence against young women in this novel is rooted in sexual exploitation, sexual objectification and trafficking of these young women.

In addition, the findings from this research indicate that the novel genre of African literature can raise awareness on the plight of women and girls who are abused sexually and emotionally. The findings further suggest that responses to violence against women must not focus exclusively on women alone but must target men and carry out adequate advocacy to tame the ugly trend. Furthermore, women should be empowered with employment opportunities since poverty has been fingered as a leading cause of abuse. More so, women who are abused should be encouraged to speak out in order to receive psychological, emotional, social and legal support.

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