***SOCIAL STUDIES NOTE FOR JSS 3***

**HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES**

Harmful traditional practices are some of the cultural practices which were handed down by our fore fathers from one generation to the other. Some of the practices were introduced to improve our morality and make the society decent. Yet, some are harmful to the individuals who practice it.

***Some examples of harmful traditional practices are explained below;***

1. **FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION** (**i.e. Female circumcision**): This is the practice of removing some part of the female genital organ. Such part is believed to be sensitive and sensational part of female sexual organ; and by removing it, female sexuality is brought under control. This practice is common in most communities in Nigeria. This can lead to fibrosis and spread of HIV/AIDS.
2. **NEGLECT AND MALTREATMENT OF WIDOWS:** Widowhood practices in West Africa are considered part of cleansing rituals designed to remove the bond that links a living spouse to a dead one. It varies from one community to the other; while some are friendly to the widows. Others are crude and evil.

**Some of the practices are;**

* They seize the properties of the dead man leaving the widow with nothing
* Her hair is scraped off with a blunt razor
* She is forced to render sharp-loud and long cries as a sign of respect to the dead husband.
* She is forbidden from leaving the compound for some weeks or months.
* She is forced to sleep next to the corpse as the dead spouse.
* She is forbidden from having her bath for a particular period.
* After which she is made to bath naked in the market square at night.
* She eats food in broken plates without washing her hands.
* If she is accused of killing her husband, she will be forced to drink or bath with the water used in cleaning/washing the dead body.

1. **FOOD TABOOS**: Some people believe that some foods are to be eaten either by the men or by the women. For example, the Igbos believes that “eke okuko” (gizzard) is reserved only for the man, especially the head of the family. Also that”ukwu anu” is reserved for the women. In some communities children are not allowed to eat egg to avoid being thievish when they grow up, thereby denying them of essential nutrients.
2. **MARRYING MORE THAN ONE WIFE:** This otherwise known as polygamous marriage is recognized in our traditional society. Nowadays, it is harmful because it brings disunity, constant fighting, quarrelling and untimely death in the family especially when the man could not cater for the family, or love one wife more than the others. Also, some marry more than a wife just to get a male child. Adoption is legal now, one should adopt instead of marrying many wives.
3. **PREFERENCE OF MALE CHILDREN:** In the olden days, male children were given preferential treatment under the erroneous thought that training the girl child is a waste of time and resources. This act of discrimination is harmful in the society.
4. **CASTE SYSTEM (OSU):** This is a class structure that is determined by birth, which means if your parents are from the caste, automatically you belong to that caste. In the south-eastern part of Nigeria, among the Igbo it is called OSU. OSU is people in the olden days that ran to the shrine (of a deity) for protection when there were no police, and this status followed all their generation. They are regarded as inferior or slave and discriminated from marrying outside the system and from becoming a leader in the community. They are seen as the property of the gods.
5. **ILLEGITIMATE PROCREATION:** This is a situation where some widows and spinsters go out to have sexual affairs with men, which usually result in illegitimate children at home. Such children whose biological fathers are difficult to trace may constitute problem in the spinster’s or widow’s home. This practice is harmful.
6. **INFANT BETHROTHAL/EARLY MARRIAGE:** Infant betrothal is a situation where marriage formalities are fulfilled for the couple before their maturity. Virginity is seen as a virtue and as a result, some parents allow their daughter to marry early. This act leads to poor sexual reproductive health of the girl child. Sometimes, it deprives the girl an opportunity of being educated and getting a well-paid-job.
7. **WITCH-HUNT:** A search for witches, persons believed to be using sorcery or harmful magic, in order to prosecute and typically kill them. Most times people are accused wrongly in the name of witch hunting.

**CONSEQUENCES OF HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES**

* **Maternal Mortality**: Early marriage usually results in early child bearing with severe health problems including death.
* **Infant Mortality:** Health problems arising at child birth or soon after have resulted in the death of many babies.
* **Diseases and Infections:** The crude methods of female circumcision and the dirty water use in washing the dead body drink by widows expose them to various infectious diseases. Also those who had ruptured bladder during child birth have their bladder leaking urine. This complication is known as Vesico Virginal Fistula (VVF).
* **Humiliation:** Widows are often humiliated during the burying and mourning of their husband. Child-mother who had VVF and who could not afford surgical operation is avoided because they stink.
* **Suicide:** Some victims of osu caste system commit suicide because of discrimination against them. Also widows and child-mothers who were forced into marriage have died out of frustration.
* **Deprivation of Human Right:** Almost all the harmful practices deprive their victims of one fundamental human right or another.
* **Lack of Pleasure:** A woman that was circumcised will lack sexual pleasure even when married.
* **Divorce:** Most women and children who were forced into marriage have an unstable marital relationship.
* **Malformed Personality:** An underage girl forced into marriage is likely to have a malformed personality. This is because she was deprived of the relationship, education, thrills and funs of youthful age which would have been the foundation for adulthood.
* **Over Population:** A girl who married in her early teen (13 – 16yrs) have many years of fertility and can bear as many children as possible. This can lead to over population and other associated problems.
* **Deprivation of Education:** Early marriage and child labour deprive the child of the opportunity of schooling. And without proper education, the chances of these children being gainfully employed are highly limited.

**PREVENTION OF HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES**

* **Public Enlightenment**: The government and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should create awareness on the evils of harmful traditional practices, especially in the rural communities.
* **Education:** Parents should be encouraged to send their children to school so that they will not be available for any form of child labour. Also when educated, will avoid practicing such harmful and outdated customs.
* **Advocacy:** Civil right group, non-governmental organizations and women groups should speak-up as well as lobby the government and traditional rulers to help stop these harmful traditional practices.
* **Legislation:** Appropriate laws should be made and strictly enforced to prohibit these evil practices. For example, the Eastern Region of Nigeria made a law prohibiting osu caste system in 1956, though it was neglected.
* **Women Empowerment:** Government and other relevant organization should empower women. This is because women who were gainfully employed cannot be subjected to these ridicules.