

Call for submissions, joint CEDAW-CRC General Recommendation/ Comment on Harmful Practices

Title: Breasts ironing in Cameroon

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Breasts ironing is a practice that consists of massaging the breasts of young girls with hot objects with the aim of making it disappear. This is an old practice and it is mostly done by mothers, grandmothers and aunts amongst others. Most often men or the father of the home is ignorant of what is happening since it is usually done in kitchens by females but in rare cases, fathers have conducted their daughters to the home of a specialist when they discovered the breasts were developing early. In some localities, you find women who are specialists in doing this massage and she is well known by everyone around.

In Cameroon, many women are victims of this cruel practice. A research was conducted in 2005 by the GIZ in collaboration with RENATA in all the ten regions which prove that 24% of young girls and women are victims of this practice. Diverse objects are being used like the grinding stone, pestle, black fruits, plantain peelings, wooden spoons, etc. These objects are being warmed on the fire and used for the massage. This massage could last from one week to several months depending on how resistant the breasts are and it also depends on how resistant the victim is to the practice.

The perpetrators do this thinking they are kind of protecting the girls. They advance the following reasons for doing it:

- Breasts attract men,
- Breasts disturb girls from concentrating in their studies
- Breasts make girls not to grow tall,
- Breasts expose girls to early pregnancy,
- Breasts expose girls to rape, etc.

This practice is very frequent in all the ten regions and it varies with age. According to the study, 50% of girls who had their breast ironed started having breasts at the age of 09, 38% before the age of 11, 24% before the age of 12, and 14% at the age of 14.

This practice has so many consequences that include the following:

- Severe pains,
- Abscesses,
- Premature flow of breast milk,
- Insomnia,
- Cysts,
- Breast lumps,
- Complete disappearance of the breasts,
- Facilitate breasts cancer.

In Cameroon, there exists no legislation yet that condemns breasts ironing. And despite the sensitization campaigns, doctors still receive new victims of this practice at the hospital with their chests burnt as a result of the practice.

For more information, you may please contact www.tantines.org or www.sosviolcameroun.org
These are the websites of RENATA.