NAPTIP resolves 187 violence, rape complaints

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The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons said it received 1,324 complaints of human rights abuses and violence against persons, resolving only 187 of those in 2022.  
  
According to its report on the implementation of the VAPP Act, 2015, 717 offences fell under the Act’s coverage. NAPTIP successfully resolved 187 cases through mediation.  
  
The report highlights spousal battery, rape, abandonment of spouse and dependents without sustenance, and physical injury as the most prevalent complaints.  
  
The spousal battery was the highest-reported offence, with 269 cases, followed by 100 cases of rape. In addition to resolving cases through mediation, NAPTIP said investigated a wide range of offences, including emotional and psychological abuse, with 63 cases investigated under this category.  
  
In terms of legal outcomes, the agency secured 24 convictions in 2022. These convictions were for offences such as rape and inflicting physical injury.  
  
Of the 31 individuals prosecuted by NAPTIP, 25 cases were filed in court, with 42 offences being tried. The majority of the prosecutions were related to rape and physical injury.  
  
The report also highlighted milestones in rehabilitating and reintegrating victims of violence. In collaboration with other agencies, NAPTIP says it provided shelter, counselling and other forms of support to 760 victims of VAP in 2022, which included 147 males and 613 females.  
  
However, the report revealed systemic challenges in securing timely justice for victims, as some complaints were withdrawn, and some survivors were unable to follow through due to a lack of resources or other factors.  
  
One of the most pressing issues was the lack of comprehensive understanding of the Act among law enforcement officers, healthcare professionals, and judicial personnel. NAPTIP said this knowledge gap hindered the effective enforcement and application of the VAPP Act.  
  
Furthermore, the difficult economic situation in the country exacerbated vulnerabilities, especially among survivors who were financially dependent on their abusers.  
  
Insufficient budgetary allocations also posed a significant obstacle for NAPTIP, as the agency struggled to fund its VAPP-related activities in the Federal Capital Territory. Additionally, there was a critical shortage of shelters and economic support for survivors, many of whom withdrew their complaints due to the absence of adequate housing and financial aid.  
  
The report further noted that cultural and societal norms, particularly in rural areas, often led to victims being pressured to drop cases, further complicating the fight against gender-based violence.  
  
A lack of infrastructure, particularly in sexual assault referral centres, also hampered progress. With only one SARC serving the entire FCT, victims had limited access to specialised support.  
  
Moreover, delays and inefficiencies in law enforcement feedback mechanisms left many victims frustrated and disillusioned, with little information on the status of their cases.  
  
In response to these challenges, the report recommended enhanced training for stakeholders involved in implementing the Act. It also proposed the creation of a Special Gender-Based Violence Victim Trust Fund to provide financial support to survivors, alongside calls for increased budgetary allocations to enable NAPTIP and other key agencies to carry out their mandates effectively.  
  
The report further emphasised the need for more shelters and economic support programs to reduce the rate of complaint withdrawals and the establishment of additional SARCs across the FCT. As of this report, NAPTIP’s spokesperson, Mr. Zacks Dauda, could not be reached for comments.  
  
In an earlier interview, Dauda told our correspondent that the agency expects to convict more VAPP offenders in the coming months, given that NAPTIP now operates under the Ministry of Justice, no longer the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation.  
  
“We returned to Justice on October 20, 2023. Eventually, we aim for more efficient delivery of justice against perpetrators of trafficking in persons because we will be interfacing with the justice ministry easier and if we have any issues, they can easily attend to us,” Dauda affirmed.