

ETHICAL PROBLEMS OF RAPE AS A SOCIAL CANKERWORM IN OUR PRESENT DAY SOCIETY

Samuel C. Okafor-Udah

Abstract

Rape is a worrisome epidemic that is becoming problematic in contemporary Nigeria due to many factors that are already inherent in the Nigerian society such as myths, culture of silence associated with rape, modernizing influences and peer group pressure among several others. This article is essentially library researched while incorporating internet sources using expository and phenomenological designs. It is discovered that the perpetrators of rape in Nigeria cut across all age brackets involving security personnel, close associates, and even relations all caught up in the crime. The paper submits that the responsibility of eradicating this evil in Nigeria lies with the parents, Churches, Civil Societies, Non Governmental Organizations and Government at all levels.

Introduction

The incessant menace of rape occurrences in modern Nigeria is certainly worrisome to the society including academic, legal, religious, medical, and political circles of the day. Rape like a cankerworm seems to be thriving and is deepening its roots by the day in the Nigerian Society. Their frightening reports appear frequently in the national dailies cutting across all age brackets in the society. The researchers quickly attempt to unravel this phenomenon that is becoming so rampant, in spite of, the present day religious boom in the country. What are the reasons behind the sudden rise in the involvement of security personnel as well as the ministers of the Gospel presumably associated in this dastardly act in Nigeria? Has there been any decisive effort geared toward checkmating the prevalent rate of this heinous crime? This article humbly attempts to examine the incidences of rape and unearth some major factors responsible for its upsurge in Nigeria. It assesses the effect as well as the various responses in the prevention of rape in Nigeria. The paper uses the terms abuse and assault interchangeably with rape.

Definition of Rape

Rape in Horn by (2006) [2] is the crime of forcing somebody to have sex with one especially with violence. It is the crime of forcefully having sex with someone against the person's wish (Chiedu, 2012). According to Brigneti and Egbonimali (2002) [4], rape is an act of sexual violence that involves intercourse without consent or against someone being willing to engage in the act.

These definitions as provided even though they seem to capture the popular notion of rape are not in themselves comprehensive. It is posited that rape could even happen "Without the use of force" (Ayonrinde, 1984, p.36). By this, it is meant, that if for instance an adult of any age range tactfully seduces a child of a tender age for either marriage or sex with an enticing gift and the child after collecting same willingly give in for it with the adult, it is said to be rape as well. This form of rape is viewed as "A sex crime carried out by pathological men who were unable to control their own sexual desires." The case of Senator Sani Yerima aged 59 years which is now forming news headlines in Nigeria following his marriage with a 13 years old Egyptian girl as wife is a good case on point (Illesanmi, 2013). Given the above scenario, rape could simply be defined as having an unlawful sexual intercourse with someone with or without the use of force

in order to achieve sexual gratification. It involves any unlawful behaviour or actions such as making a child to touch, caress or suck one's private parts or genital organs to derive sexual pleasures (Chukwuma, 2013). It is equally said that in any case whatsoever, once the law of love is violated in any love making, even if it is within marriage, it is equally a deviant act tantamount to rape (Litchfield and Litchfield, 2012). They also maintain that rape is nearly always committed by males, and may be either heterosexual or homosexual.

Cases of Rape prevalence in Nigeria

Rape is alarmingly common in Nigeria. It probably has been in existence in the traditional society and only became public knowledge with the advent of the electronic and print media at the wake of modern Pentecostalism in Nigeria sometimes in the 1970s. Its baffling prevalent upsurge is reported to have gone up in the recent past from 12.5 percent to 80 percent in Nigeria (Chiedu, 2012). Rape is a global problem with women and children being mostly vulnerable (Onah, 2010). They are the ones bearing the brunt of this evil in every society of the world according to Chiedu (2012). There are several cases, which are very irritating. Now and then, it is reported that a teacher has raped a* student. A religious leader has raped his flock. Robbers have raped a victim. A man has raped a sister-in-law or daughter-in-law. A master has raped a housemaid. A security man has raped his master's wife. A boss has raped his staff. A father has raped his daughter. A young man has raped his grandmother. A minor has raped a fellow minor. A traditional ruler has raped a subject. An 80 year old man has raped an 8 year old girl.

From this lengthy assertion, it is quite glaring that rape cases are shocking reality in the Nigerian society. It appears that everyday girls and boys, women and men are sexually being abused even by persons known to the victim, who perhaps shamefully takes due advantage of such familiarity (Udekwe, 2013) [11]. As the situation truly is in Nigeria. Nowadays, girls and women, sometimes even the men too are sexually harassed by rapists on the streets, markets, and institutions of learning. Several of such cases are reported in the courts, radio stations and newspapers almost daily in Nigeria. It is a known fact that many of these rapists are young men in their teens, while others are matured adults (Obasi, 2007). Historical records show that no fewer than 1200 girls were raped in Rivers state in 2012 (Kawu, 2013)

Equally, a man is allegedly reported to have been raped to death in the early hours of Tuesday, July 17, 2012 by his six wives in Ogbadibo Local Government Area of Benue State (Malcolm, 2012). In Enugu state, a notorious aged women rapist was arrested by the police sometime in May 2013 in Opi village of Nsukka Local Government Area. He was said to have confessed in the court that he committed the act because he could not find any young lady to marry (Kawu, 2013). In a related development, John (2013), reports another case of sexual assault thus: " A cleric that described himself as chairman of Bishops in River state, Bishop Nwabueze, has been arrested for allegedly raping a 15 year old girl and sponsoring the abortion of the baby". It is held that Bishop Nwabueze who confessed to the act blamed it on a set up by other Bishops who according to him have been eyeing the position he occupied. His denial may not be true because the act was committed by the bishop himself with a teenager. He should have not given in to the act. From all indications, it is evident that rape cases in Nigeria is not a new practice but only that it appears to be assuming a new dimension with children now forming the bulk of the victims (Odeh, 2013). According to Ejim (2013) [17]. "The incidence of baby and child rape has currently hit a statistic of up to 70 percent of total rape cases in Nigeria" (p.l). As discovered,

children molestation is indeed becoming a sad reality which must be grappled with and which also must be nabbed in the bud otherwise it will, make Nigeria appear dishonourable to other nations. As it happened, Rotimi (2013) notifies that in Lagos state recently, a 2 and 3 year old girls were raped by adults aged 25 and 35 years old respectively. Records has it that Sylvester Ehijere, 48 year old man of No. 8 Kolawole Sebili Street, Iyana Ejigbo, Lagos has been sexually abusing his two daughters until March 2013, when he was exposed, arrested and is currently facing trial for his alleged crime (Odeh, 2013). Added to this is the fact that in 2008, the police and government officials in Kano reported that there is an upsurge in incidences of child rape, fearing that young girls are now unsafe in the city. The fact is that, within six months of the rape incidence in Kano, 54 cases of child rape are reported in that city alone. In the same vein, it is reported in Ekiti state that a police man raped a 12 year old girl in the capital city. In Niger state, a 6 year old girl was sexually abused by one Ibrahim, a 17 year old boy (Alhassan, 2013). With the passage of time, one Ayibakuro Joel Lambert was equally arrested and arraigned before the court for raping his own 7 year old daughter. This was followed by the detention of another man said to have carried out sexual assault on his biological daughter and granddaughter (Ejim, 2013). The prevalent rate of rape cases in Nigeria as it is observed seems to signify that the incident is on rise, it is not abating. According to Mahoney (2012) [21], "Statistics show that one out of four women will be a rape victim by the time they graduate from college. Christian teen girls are no less likely to become victims of the rape". Rape cases are not limited to Nigeria alone. Other countries of the globe have their own side of the story too. The recent happening in India perhaps testifies to the fact that rape epidemic is already widespread. It is news that four men identified as Akshay Thakur, Pawan Gupta, Mukesh Singh and Vinay Shama have been sentenced to death by hanging because they gang raped and murdered a 23 year old Physiotherapy student in New Delhi, in India. In Chicago, there came a report that a 9 year old girl was found raped, beaten, and poisoned on the seventh floor stairway of her Cabrini Green housing project on January 9, 1997 (Adeleye, 1997) [23]. In London, Samura in Elomah (2009) [24] maintains that 92 young people had been convicted of involvement in gang rape. Added to this, Kenya equally has a track record of rape case. Sadly, Kenyan government survey reveals that "One in five women and girls are victims of sexual violence". This survey indicates that more than 240 victims of child rape cases in Kenya are from 3 years of age and above. Of particular interest is South Africa which is currently being spotlighted as the country with the highest record of rape in the whole world, with a rape case occurring every 26 seconds including rape of babies as young as 2 weeks old (Ejim, 2013). It is observed that in South Africa, "One in four men had committed rape" (Elombah, 2009, p.1). Elombah estimates that 500,00 rapes are committed annually in South Africa. As can be deciphered, almost in all the countries, especially South Africa and Nigeria, the prevalent rate of rape cases is quite striking. It is therefore no exaggeration to accept that "There is an epidemic of rape in Nigeria and our chief protectors and prosecutors are also chief rapists".

Causes for the increasing rate of rape cases in Nigeria

The rate at which rape incident is multiplying in Nigeria is alarming. This is likely because "Sex is a powerful force" (O'Donovan, 1997, p.284). it is something like fire. Sex simply refers to sexual intercourse between two parties" (Amaugo, 2006). It is "When a male and female person have such closed contact that involves the introduction of the male's penis into the female's vagina" (Ayonrinde, 1984). Amaugo (2006) avers that sexual desire is a gift from God. He

observes that "If there is anything that is common in our world today, it is sexual activities. Sex is everywhere,... It has permeated every nook and cranny of the society" According to Obasi.

Mention sex and everybody's ear is wide open. The subject of sex receives more attention than any other curricular or extra-curricular topic in the academic world. It is being discussed and even practised in the hidden and open places alike. Sex has a propelling force that stimulates the curiosity of and interest of both the youth and the adult. People of all professions make much haste in quest for knowledge of sex, formally or informally. Sex has been made a central theme in our contemporary society. This is proved by the large number of erotic magazines, pornographic films, nude posters, sensual booklets and seductive dresses that have flooded our markets and film industry (p.l). This long quotation aptly summarizes and unmasks the key determinants for the ever bewildering phenomenon of rape in Nigeria. Given the above, it is utmost expedience that this paper carefully brings to public notice some of the casual factors underlying astronomical rate of the rape epidemic in Nigeria at the present. At any rate, experts, in considering the unabated nature of these rape cases in Nigeria advance the following causes for the unfortunate reality:

Peer group pressure/influence

Peer group is an important factor in the upsurge of rape cases in Nigeria. Innocent youths who keep regular company of rapists may easily learnt their evil ways no matter how careful they think they are. According to Isangedighi (1990) [29], most adolescent are led into sexual promiscuity by peer influence. It is often said that children who are more influenced by their parents are more likely to adopt socially acceptable sexual behaviour than those who are more influenced by their peers. As it happens, most adolescents in trying to remain relevant and to gain the continual approval of their friends try to experiment sex through raping.

Myths about sex

There are quite a number of myths about sex which serves as an impetus to the growing incident of rape in Nigeria. Okoro (2011), in his studies reveals that it is a common belief among many ethnic groups that: without premarital sexual intercourse, boys are bound to have small testicles, suffer from pimples, have difficult erection and not be able to perform better when married. Girls, on the other hand are bound to have small breast, experience early menopause, painful menstruation and painful nipple when breast feeding their babies. That apart, some HIV infected men held to the superstitions belief that if they have sex with a virgin, that they can be cured of AIDS (Garland, 2003). This perhaps lured most people living with HIV and AIDS to resort to raping innocent girls in the society in their quest for a cure.

Exposure to modernity

Adolescents in Nigeria today are being bombarded by modernizing influences. They read about sex in novels, books, magazine and newspapers. It is said that adolescents also "Watch various types of pornographic movies aside from being exposed to sexually overloaded advertisement in newspapers and the television. All these and the sexually graphic music, movies, obscene literature directed at the adolescents arouse their interest in sex" (Isangedighi, 1990, p.285). Most parents also incautiously buy rent video cassette, CD plates and movies for their children to be watching most of the times, which in a way stir up their sexual desires. Close to this is the fact that some parents allows their wards to spend too much time watching television where sex is

used by most factories to advertise things like toothpaste, drinks and flashy cars which likely put younger generation under terrific pressure to go into sex (Garland, 2001). As a result of this exposure, the adolescents are perpetually under pressure to experiment on sex even if it means raping. According to Gberindyer (2010). "Some of them desire to experience it once, just to know how it is. But they become captured by the power of immorality" (p,6). This situation makes raping inevitable among the Nigerian youths.

Influence of indecent dressing

Indecent dressing in women and girls are inappropriate mode of dressing that often exposes parts of one's body that should be covered from public view (Diara and Nweze, 2011) [34]. Indecent dressing can engineer sexual desire culminating in sexual seduction. According to Eze (2011), "It has been fashionable, particularly among the youthful female folk, to dress so half nakedly that some parts of their body that are supposed to be 'hidden' are exposed to the public" (p.77). It is maintained that "Ladies attract men by wearing sexy or transparent dresses" (Okpara, 2005, p.6). This type of fashion is particularly rampant among College and University students, which apparently is becoming a common mode of dressing for the masses in Nigeria today. A survey by Ayogu (2011) [37], sheds light that even some parents buy clothes for their children to wear with such negative " Inscription like: I am a sexy girl, Hug me tight, Lovely babe-sexy babe, I am 4 u, Kiss me fast, Touch me, Deep kiss, Romance me, Fuck me! Devil's advocate" (p.76). Expectedly, the wearing of these psychedelic and ludicrous dresses that advertise ladies nudity side by side the unusual painting of their faces presents a very strong pull to rapists to carry on their exploits.

The Nature of Adolescent

Adolescent generally have strong desire for sex. This is said to be motivated by hormonal increase and activity which create an upsurge of sexual interest in the adolescents. Psychologists believe that adolescent period is a time of sexual activeness with their sexual drive developing to .the highest point (Benwell et al., 2000) [38]. This period is the most critical and precarious stage in the adolescents which is marked with confusion and turbulence (Jersild, 1963). This propels the adolescents to experiment on anything including rape in order to satisfy their sexual drive.

Rape and stigmatization

There seems to be a culture of silence surrounding rape in Nigeria. The social stigma associated with rape across the globe forces female victims in Nigeria to conceal rape assaults in order to save themselves from shame and public embarrassment. Even parents of the raped often find it difficult to come out publicly to report such cases. According to Brigneti and Egbonimali (2002), in Nigeria, when a woman is raped and it becomes public notice, "She and her family are "ostracized" due to the dishonour associated with rape". Another reason for not taking a bold step in reporting such cases could be for the victim's family to maintain the ever existing cordial relationship with the parents of the perpetrator of the heinous crime. This situation encourages other intenders to go into raping since people who indulge in it do so and go scot-free.

Mishandling of rape cases

Another concrete reason why it seems that rapists go about their business with impunity is not unconnected with the lax rape laws in the country (Ejim, 2013). It is observed that, "The laws in Nigeria appear to further victimize and humiliate women. They do not bring justice to them"

(p.3). As it has been, the rigorous requirement involved in producing authentic evidence of rape such as getting a medical report as well as a police report and within the shortest possible interval of any rape incident in question seems to trivialise the whole matter. It is an open secret that some policemen in Nigeria are fond of treating rape victims as though they are the offenders themselves (Ejim, 2013). In some cases, it is held that the police after demanding in vain to get bribe in order to investigate rape cases, accuse the victims of consenting to the sexual intercourse with the rapists. A report also indicates that one of the rape victims was even put in a cell for reporting a police rapist. It is an established fact that police in Nigeria do contribute to a culture of tolerance for sexual violence against women. As revealed by Alhassan (2013), "Over a hundred cases of violence against the child and women often go without any of the culprits being prosecuted and jailed" (p.3). This probably may account for the reason an Abuja High Court Judge; Umoh Enah has recently lampooned the Nigerian Police for its poor handling and prosecution of an alleged rapist.

Rape and the Nigerian constitution

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria seems to contribute in a way to the growing cases of rape in Nigeria. It is most probable that the interpretation of section 357 of the Criminal Code Act, CAP 77,LFN, 1990 which opines that "Any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, if consent is obtained by force or by means of false threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or by means of false or fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband is guilty of an offence called rape" (Musbau, 2013, p.53) and especially section 282 of the penal code which says that " Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not a rape, if she has attained puberty" (Olurounbi, 2013; Raymond, 2013) does not seem to favour victims of rape in Nigeria. This appears to exonerate people who promote child rape in the name of marriage from punishment by the law. This also implies that the Nigerian constitution seems to have no regard for full maturity of 18 years old before marriage. As it is, Nigerian laws appear not to prevent rape especially child rape, provided it is done under the cover of marriage. In Nigeria, it is common knowledge that the existing Customary and Sharia laws which encourage contrary religious and cultural practices other than the ones stipulated in the Nigerian constitution directly or indirectly affect female folks in no small ways. For instance, the toleration of Sharia law in Nigeria makes the prosecution of rape cases in Northern Nigeria very difficult.

However, the House of Representatives Abuja on Tuesday March 5, 2013 approved life imprisonment for any person convicted of rape. They equally approved a minimum of 20 years in jail terms without option of fine for persons convicted of gang rape (Bickley and Beech, 2001). Thereafter the senate.

Consequences of rape in Nigeria

The issue of rape is both a physical as well as spiritual problem. It equally has physiological, psychological, moral and social consequences on the raped, whether man or woman. In the opinion of Obasi (2007), "Rape leaves painful memories and a lifelong consequences on the victim" (p.34). It inspires permanent damages on its victims. Rape equally degrades as well as violates a whole tribe or nation. Rape, it is noted terribly hurts women. It is, in the words of Olufemi Kayode "Like stabbing a heart and leaving the knife there" (Odeh, 2013, p.20). To their thinking, Brigneti and Egbonimali (2002) sustain that "If virginity is what makes women

honourable, rape is an easy weapon to permanently damage them" (p.2). This implies that a lady who has hitherto been so disciplined sexually so as to preserve her priceless virginity could suddenly lose that prestige without bargaining for it as a result of rape. According to Inuwa Sani, a Child Psychologist, the trauma that follows this bitter experience is better imagined than described. Alhassan (2013) captures the consequences thus: In the months following a rape, victims often have symptoms of depression or traumatic stress. They are more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs to control their symptoms. Nearly one-third have thoughts of suicide, and approximately 17 percent actually attempt suicide. Thirty percent of victims will go on to develop major depressive or post-traumatic stress disorders in their lifetime, long-time negative effects on sexually and inability to form or maintain trusting relationships are common.

Moreover, rape could have direct effect on the family in many ways. This happens if in the course of the act, the rapist or the raped contracts sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and AIDS, gonorrhoea, and syphilis among others that may permanently damage their reproductive system, thus rendering them sterile or resulting to untimely death (Ferguson, 1998). Added to this is the fact that rape may lead to unwanted pregnancy, abortion, abandonment of babies or other forms of child abuse and suicide (Nzeakor, 2002; Wasike, 1999).

In addition, pregnancy resulting from rape may shorten one's life, leads to school drop-out, and also leads to rushing into an unplanned marriage and marrying the wrong person (Finn and Finn, 2012) [50]. Psychologically too, rape may bring guilt, anxiety, fear, disappointment, frustration, anger at self and others, image depression and lowered self-esteem (Litchfield and Litchfield, 2012). Rape could also usher in demoralization, prayerlessness, and backsliding from Christian faith (Ferguson, 1998).

Recommendations

Following the trend of this discussion, it is worthwhile to proffer the mentioned recommendations: the society should exhibit zero-tolerance to rape by engaging in rape intolerance attitudes and increase level of empathy. Bride price or dowry should be affordable to encourage every adult to have a wife or sex partner in Nigeria. All those who are prone to rape should be encouraged to use their physical might for self-defence. That is anything they can do to overpower a rapist should not be used against them, when the case is judged. Every perpetrator of rape should be exposed to take full responsibility for his or her actions and should under no circumstance be shielded or protected by parents, Churches and colleagues. People of all age brackets should be instructed to begin to guard their thoughts as enjoined by their holy books since rape is a product of overcharged sexual desires and lusts. Every case should be given a chance to see the light of the day in the law courts in Nigeria. More Civil Societies and NGOs should be formed to battle against this notorious evil in Nigeria. All rape victims should be shown much love and care to reengineer their self-image.

Conclusions

Rape is probably endemic in Nigeria and is likely going to escalate if no proactive steps are taken seriously and immediately. Rape is discovered to have taken new dimension in Nigeria at the moment with some of the female folks raping the males sometimes at gun point. It is worrisome revealing that a statistical percentage of 31.4 of Nigerian females lost their virginity through raping. It is equally unravelled that the ever spreading superstitious belief about sex is

one of the major contributors to the increasing rape cases in Nigeria perpetrated mostly by clergymen, traditional title holders, lecturers, family friends, uncles, aunties, and even unscrupulous parents. This paper submits that all parents, Churches, Civil Societies, NGOs, and government agencies should as a matter of necessity and urgency create the enabling playing ground for the provision of a qualitative and proper sex education and guidance to the teeming Nigerian youths so as to reduce the current rape menace to the barest minimum in Nigeria.

References

- Brigneti, P. & Egbonimali, S. (2002). "Rape in Nigeria: Theory & Reality" Retrieved from: <http://www.Guardian.co.uk/world/2002/auQ/20/Qanda.islam> on July 4, 2013.
- Bride, Child Not Witch, Child Not House Girl", Retrieved from <http://freethoucihts.com> on Sept. 10, 2013. Chukwuma, J.E. (2013), "Why Sexual Abuse of Kids is Increasing", in The News 06 May, 2013. Pp. 18-20. Litchfield, B and Litchfield, N. (2012). How to Talk to your Child about Sex, Benin City: Religious Broadcasting Publishing Company.
- Chiedu, A. (2012). "Rape of Nigerians and Country: What Shall We Do?" Retrieved from: <http://niQeriQvillageSQquare.com/auest-articles/rape-of-niQerians-and-county~what-shall-we-do.htm!> on July 4, 2013
- Hornby, A.S (2006). *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 7th Edition, New York: Oxford University Press
- John, T, (2013). "Unholy Sex: Bishop Rapes a 15 Year-Old Girl", Wednesday, July 3, 2013. Vol. 10, No. 2660, P.9.
- Kawu, LM. (2013). "Nigeria's Troubling Epidemic of Rape", Retrieved from <http://www.niQeristroublinQepidemicofrape>, on July 4, 2013.
- Malcolm, (2012). "Rape Under Nigerian Law: Time for a Review", Retrieved from: <http://saymolcolm.Wordpress.com/2012/07/25/> On July 4, 2013.
- Onah, N.G. (2010). "Human Trafficking in Nigeria: A Christian Response", in *Nsukka Journal Religion and Cultural Studies*, Vol.3, No. 1, pp. 141-160.
- Udekwe, N.V. (2013). "Sexual Abuse among the Adolescents in Nigeria: Religious Implications and the Way Forward", M.A. Seminar paper, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State. Obasi, F.A. (2007). *Sexual Perversion in the Adolescents: Causes, Consequences and cures*, Jos: Jos University Press Ltd.