

SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW ON THE INCIDENCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF RAPE ON VICTIMS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The incidence of rape, despite being severely under-reported in many parts of the world, due to stigmatization cast on those who have been raped, has become a worrisome social problem. There is currently an alarming rise in rape cases in many parts of the world. United Nations statistics on incidences of rape compiled from government sources showed that more than 250,000 cases of rape or attempted rape were recorded by the police annually. The reported data covered 65 countries, Nigeria inclusive. This review paper therefore examined the incidence or prevalence of rape in Nigeria and the implications of rape on victims. It also canvassed for measures to eradicate the menace of rape in the Nigerian society. Consequently, aggressive public enlightenment and rape awareness campaign was strongly recommended. This should be extended to schools, social clubs, cultural group gatherings, and churches and mosques through health workers and civil society organizations to minimize the incidence of the cankerworm of rape Nigeria.

Keywords: Rape, Implication of rape, Victims of rape, Nigeria

Introduction

Rape has become an issue of global concerns given the several health implications it has on victims. Rape has serious psychological and health consequences for the victim. The definitions of rape are culturally and historically contingent upon the particular sexual mores of a time. Recently, the definition of rape has been expanded to include any gender, and now contains stricter definitions of consent (Boundless, 2017). Rape is often thought of as a crime committed by a man against a woman, but increasingly, social and legal definitions of rape recognize that this does not have to be the case. In 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigation updated its definition of rape, which had originally been instituted in 1972, and which previously limited rape to a crime against women. This definition, considered outdated and overly narrow, was replaced by a new definition, which recognizes that rape can be perpetrated by a person of any gender against a victim of any gender. The new definition also broadens the instances in which a victim is unable to give consent. These instances now include temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity and incapacity caused by the use of drugs or alcohol (Boundless, 2017). Similarly, rape connotes an unlawful sexual activity carried out forcibly

against a person's will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness or deception.

Rape is severely under-reported or rarely reported in many parts of the world, due to the extreme social stigma, cast on those who have been raped or the fear of being disowned by their families, or subjected to violence. Consequently, in countries where sexual assault or premarital sex are illegal, victims of rape are forced to face prosecution under these laws, where there is no sufficient evidence to prove rape in the court. Even if they can prove their rape case, evidence during the investigation may surface showing that they were not virgins as at the time of the rape. The World Population Review (2021) revealed that approximately 35% of women worldwide have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime. In most countries with data available on rape, less than 40% of women who experience sexual violence seek help; less than 10% seek assistance from law enforcement. This is because many women who experience sexual violence seldom report or come forward about their incidences, exact rape numbers are challenging to report. World Population Review (WPR) (2021) reported that the country with the highest number of rape cases in the world is South Africa with 132.4 incidents per 100,000 people.

According to a survey conducted by the South African Medical Research Council, approximately one in four men surveyed admitted to committing rape. The World population Review report also showed that the second highest country with rape incidence is Botswana with 92.9% of rape cases in the world. The United States is also not left out as she has a rape rate of 27.3. As in many other countries, rape is grossly underreported in the United States due to victim shaming, fear of reprisal, fear of family knowing, cases not being taken seriously by law enforcement, and possible lack of prosecution for the perpetrator. Only 9% of rapists in the US get prosecuted, and only 3% of rapists will spend a day in prison. 97% of rapists in the United States will walk free (World Population Review, 2021). Many of the countries with high rape statistics need to look beyond just legislation to fix the problem. These countries need to look at the deep, systematic dysfunction of their cultures and social norms that have not prevented and do not prevent sexual violence. According to UNICEF, six out of ten children in Nigeria experience emotional, physical or sexual abuse before the age of 18, with half experiencing physical violence (Stein, 2015). A study analyzing the hospital records of 76 sexual assaulted victims in Ile-Ife from 2007-2011 found out that, the majority (76.1%) of the victims that sought help at a hospital did so within 24 hours of their sexual assault, but forensic evidence was not gathered because rape kits are yet to be introduced in the country (Adepegba, 2016).

With regards to a United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Report in 2015 about the rape incidence in Nigeria, it noted that about one in four girls and one in ten boys had experienced sexual violence before the age of 18. Similarly, findings from a survey conducted by Positive Action for Treatment Access have shown that over 31.4 percent of girls said that their first sexual encounter had been raped or forced sex of some kind (Is’haq, 2013).

The incidence of rape has become a social problem as a result of the alarming rise in rape cases. Recently in June 2020 reports from the police department in Kano state, Nigeria revealed that a 32-year-old man confessed to having raped over 40 women within the state. In the same vein, the Premium Times also observed that Nigeria recorded 717 cases of rape within five months, specifically from January through May 2020 (Premium Times-News, 2020).

From the statements above, it is crystal clear that the rape scourge is on the increase all across the world. Rape is not a delightful sight to behold and it is so devastating for the victims, even when the assaulters are persecuted in rare cases. There is therefore an urgent need for this menace to be tamed, especially in Nigeria where the scourge is assuming an alarming proportion. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the incidence of rape and several implications on the victims and suggests actions that could be taken to tame this menace.

Table1: Ten Countries with the Highest Rape Rates in the World in 2020

Countries	Rape Rates (%)
South Africa	132.4
Botswana	92.9
Lesotho	82.7
Eswatini	77.5
Bermuda	67.3
Sweden	63.5

Suriname	45.2
Costa Rica	36.7
Nicargua	31.6
Grenada	30.6

Source: World Population Review (2021)

The data in table 1 shows the statistics on the incidence of rape across various countries in the world, the ten afore listed countries have the highest rates of rape cases in year 2020 with South Africa having the highest number of rape cases in the world.

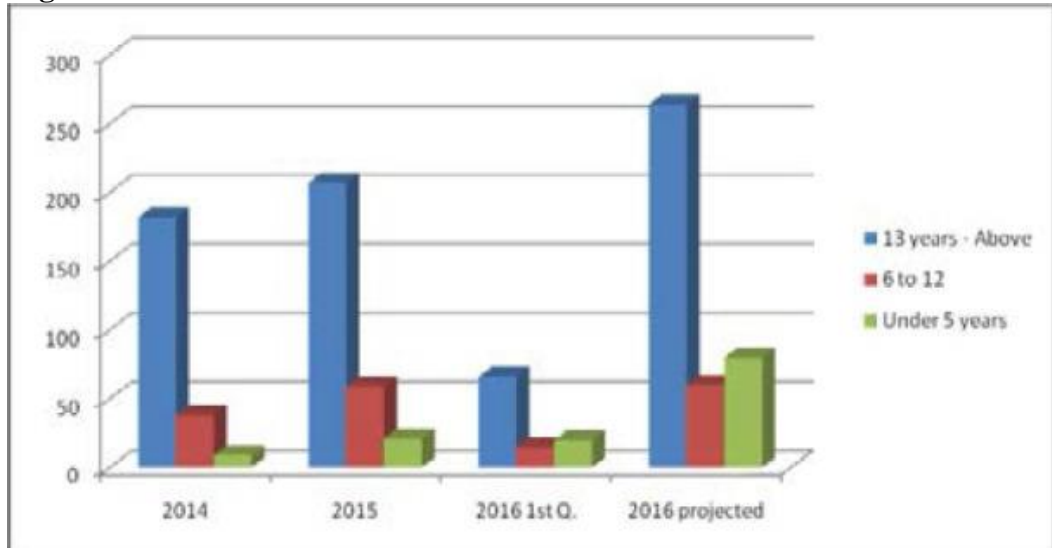
Table 2: Incidence of Rape Cases in Nigeria

Year	No of cases
2017	2279
2020 (first five months)	717

Source: Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (2017) & Premium Times-News (2020)

In Nigeria, the incidence of rape are grossly underreported and the data in table 2 only revealed the rape cases that were reported in 2017 and the first five months in 2020. The preceding years had little or no data to reflect the prevalence of rape within the various states in Nigeria. Many studies have established that official records of rape statistics are grossly insufficient in offering insights to the extent of the prevalence of sexual assaults and rape within the states in Nigeria. However, figure 1 shows a record from Tamar sexual assault center on the reported cases of rape in Enugu State, Nigeria in 2014 through 2016 and table 3 shows a Nigeria Bureau of Statistics breakdown of the states with the highest number of reported cases of rape and indecent assault in the various states in Nigeria in 2017.

Fig 1: Incidence of Rape Cases on Different Age Groups in Enugu State of Nigeria in 2014/2016



Source: Idoko, Nwabodo and Idoko (2020)

The total number of rape and sexual assault cases reported to the Tamar Sexual Assault Center (TSAC) in Enugu from April 2014 to June 2016 was 516 cases. The TSAC revealed that the highest incidence of rape victims were aged 13 years and above. Figure 1 shows the extracts from the records of TSAC. Figure 1 reflects that ages 13 years and above present most cases of rape in all the years assessed, followed closely by the age bracket 6 to 12 years. The under 5 years old represent the least affected age group. The exact percentages of these occurrences are aptly captured in the data. The figure further shows that most victims of rape are in the age range of 13 and above. In 2014, 2015, 1st quarter of 2016 and projected 2016 those that are 13 year and above that were raped represent 79%, 72%, 65% and 65% of the total number of rape cases in the state respectively. Those in age brackets 6 to 12 years represent 17%, 21%, 15% and 15% of those raped in 2014, 2015, 1st quarter 2016 and projected 2016 respectively while rape victims who are under 5 years represent 3%, 7%, 20% and 20% in 2014, 2015, 1st quarter 2016 and projected 2016 respectively in Enugu State. The implication of this data reflects the surging incidences of rapes cases in the State.

Table 3: States with the Highest Number of Reported Cases of Rape and Indecent Assault in Nigeria in 2017

States	Number of Reported Cases of Rape and Indecent Assault
Lagos	441
Kano	237
Abuja	132
Abia	98
Borno	97
Kaduna	95
Delta	93
Bayelsa	88
Akwa-Ibom	83
Jigawa	83
Oyo	83
Plateau	66
Cross River	65
Gombe	52
Ekiti	51

Source: Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2017)

The findings on table 3 revealed the states with the highest number of reported cases of rape and indecent assault across various states in Nigeria. The state with the highest number of rape cases is Lagos state which was duly followed by Kano and Abuja. The implication of this findings revealed that rape cases are most prevalent in metropolitan localities.

Theoretical Framework: *Feminist Theory*

The theoretical framework is anchored on the feminist theory. The strand of feminist theory used in this study is liberal feminism. It has its root in 19th century first-wave feminism and its focus on achieving gender equality through social, political, legal, social and cultural parameters (Charles, 2005; Ritzer &

Stepnisky, 2014). Liberal feminism argues that society has a false belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men (Tong, 2009, p. 2). They traced the root cause of women's oppression in patriarchal gender relations as opposed by legal systems. The theory seeks to challenge this arrangement by rejecting standard gender roles and male oppression. The emphasis focused on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means, as against radical feminists who call for an overthrow of the existing system (Charles, 2005, p.290). On gender oppression, they describe women's situation as the consequence of direct power relation between them and men, in which the latter (males) have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using and oppressing the former (females) in the display of dominance (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2014). These oppressions towards women are often expressed through sexual harassments both within and outside the home. A husband feeling ownership and entitlement to sexual gratification violates his wife and those institutionalized structures of patriarchy had never questioned that as a pervasion.

Factors Influencing Incidence of Rape in Nigeria

1. **The Desire for Power and Control over Women:** Rape is seen as an act of power or dominance of one person over another. According to Brigneti and Egbonimali (2002), rape is an act of sexual violence that involves intercourse without consent or against someone being unwilling to engage in the act. Rape is the most gruesome form of violence against women. Controlling abusers use tactics to exert power and control over their victims. The tactics themselves are psychologically and sometimes physically abusive. Control may be exerted through economic abuse, limiting the victim, as they may not have the means to resist or leave the abuse (Economic Abuse Wheel, 2016). The goal of the abuser is to control, intimidate, and influence the victim to feel they do not have an equal voice in the relationship (Jill, & Karen, 2000). Similarly, Ibekwe, Oli, Nwankwo and Ikezue (2018) noted that in patriarchal societies, girls are socialized to be passive, nurturing and receptive to male domineering attitudes. Consequently, they appear less likely to challenge men's aggression, even in sexual molestation.
2. **Age:** Another major factor that influences the prevalence of rape is age. Young women are usually found to be more at risk of rape than older women. Certain forms of sexual violence, for instance, are very closely associated with a young age, in particular violence taking place in schools and colleges, and trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. Studies conducted in Nigeria disclose that young girls are victims in the majority of reported assault cases in hospitals. A four-year review of sexual assault cases at LASUTH that began in 2008 and ended in December 2012, showed that out of a total of 287 reported cases of

sexual assault, 83% of the victims were below the age of 19 (UNICEF, 2015). A one-year survey conducted at Enugu State University Teaching Hospital between 2012 and 2013 revealed that 70% of sexual assault victims were under the age of 18. In the Enugu survey, the majority of the victims knew their perpetrators and the assault occurred inside uncompleted buildings and the victims or perpetrators residence (UNICEF, 2015).

3. **Alcohol and Drug Consumption:** Increased vulnerability to sexual violence also stems from the use of alcohol and other drugs. Consuming alcohol or drugs makes it more difficult for people to protect themselves by interpreting and effectively acting on warning signs. Drinking alcohol may also place a person in settings where his or her chances of encountering a potential offender are greater. Women are also at high risk of being raped while under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Dumbili & Williams (2020) in their study exploring alcohol facilitated sexual violence against Nigerian female students revealed that some men admitted buying alcoholic drinks for women thereby pressing them to drink above their limits and raping them when they were inebriated/intoxicated.
4. **Drink Spiking:** This is another risk factor that facilitates date rape and sexual assault. Alcohol effects on men and women differ; compared with men, women generally become intoxicated more quickly after consuming alcohol. So as a result, some men encourage women to consume large quantities of alcohol believing that when women are intoxicated they are more likely to resist sexual advances.
5. **The Commodification of Women Bodies.** The patriarchal beliefs still pervade Nigerian society and women continue to suffer physical, psychological violence by men. Fawole, Osungbade, and Fayewa (2002) found that 36.3% of participants had suffered attempted or completed rape. The interesting revelation is that out of 19 young females who had experienced rape only one had reported it to the police which invariably promote the culture of silence in Nigeria. In a 2013 poll of 585 randomly selected adults from six Nigerian geopolitical zones by NOI Polls, 34% answered 'What do you think is the most prevalent cause of rape in the society?' with 'indecent dressing'. 29% said they knew a victim of rape. Also, the Lagos state police command has arrested a man Ike Iwuanyanwu (Punch, 2016) for allegedly raping and impregnating his 15years old daughter at Ajao Estate, in Isolo area of Lagos State. Furthermore, the court in Edo state has sentenced a man to 14 years' imprisonment for raping his 17years old daughter for an alleged money ritual. So it is never a gainsaying that rape has turned to a cankerworm in the fabric of our nation.

Implications of Rape on the Victims of Rape in Nigeria

- 1. Psychological Trauma:** Rape can cause devastating physical and psychological trauma. In the aftermath of an attack, many victims develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is a severe anxiety disorder. The victim feels depressed psychologically once he/she remembers the occurrence. He/she will feel perplexed to the extent that the thinking and thought of such a victim will be negative if not properly handled and advised. (Kehinde, Austin, & Taiwo, 2014, p. 124). Rape victims may also confront several emotions related to shame. Often, victims blame themselves for rape. Some victims come to believe they somehow deserved the assault, while others become preoccupied thinking about how the rape could have been avoided. Although self-blame might seem like an unusual, intensely individual response to rape, it is rooted in social conceptions of rape and victimhood. In the case of rape, victim-blaming generally refers to the belief that certain behaviours on the part of the victim like flirting or wearing provocative clothing, encourage assault.
- 2. Stigmatization:** In Nigeria, the rape victim is frequently victimized twice. First by the violence she endures and by the failure of the governments to bring her abusers to justice. 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 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. In Nigeria, when a woman is raped and it becomes public knowledge, she and her family are ostracized due to the dishonour associated with rape. Another reason for not taking the 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 go scot-free.
- 3. Flashbacks:** Most of the victims of rape are always faced with the psychological defect; it is normal for human beings to reflect on things been done in the past, so there is a tendency for any victim of rape to have a flashback, which might render the victim traumatized and in the long inflict harm on themselves.
- 4. Self-Harm:** This is another negative effect of rape on the victim. The negativity in the mind, soul and heart of the victim will automatically graduate from flashing back, post-traumatic stress disorder to self-harm because their mind refuses to heal after the aftereffects which might lead the victim to self-harm which in turn results in suicide. According to Campbell (2013), rape is a social problem that could easily lead to suicide

or suicidal attempt. She noted that a gang-raped female student survivor was rescued and hospitalized as she tried to hang herself. Another sexually assaulted female student by multiple young men who took photos and circulated them on social media committed suicide as she became devastated and hopeless.

5. **Sexually Transmitted Infection:** Victims of rape are also exposed to several diseases which might affect their mental and physical health. Women are prone to contracting sexually transmitted infection especially when the perpetrators do not use protection during sex. Some diseases transmitted through sex include chronic pelvic pain, gonorrhea, urinary infection, and HIV (Obasola, Omonia, Omonia, 2014).

Recommendations on Measures to Reduce Incidence of Rape in Nigeria

1. Civil Societies and NGOs should initiate elaborate enlightenment campaigns against rape and rapists. They should exhibit zero-tolerance to rape by engaging in rape intolerance attitudes and as well as dispelling sex myths in Nigeria using the media.
2. The international community, including the United Nations and African Union, should encourage and support Nigeria in implementing fully all international and regional treaties, declarations, resolutions and recommendations aimed at condemning, prohibiting and preventing all acts of violence against women.
3. All cases of violence must be investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice following international standards of fair trial and without recourse to the death penalty, and reparations provided to the victims. They should also support and encourage initiatives by the Nigerian authorities, women groups and Human rights organizations in their fight against the rape scourge and other forms of violence against women in Nigeria.
4. Civil society groups should demand that women in Nigeria be treated as equal members of society, and also help create an environment that supports and address all forms of violence against women that have become commonplace in Nigeria today by raising awareness through the media; building community structures and processes to protect women, and providing assistance to victims of violence.

Conclusion

From the study, it can be observed that the incidence of rape in Nigeria, as well as other countries, has been alarming. It, therefore, becomes imperative that we embrace a pragmatic approach to collaborate with other international agencies and stakeholders in the Nigerian economy to sensitize the populace on the negative implications of rape in society. The cardinal point that we must all appreciate is public enlightenment and education from schools, social clubs,

cultural group gatherings, and churches through efforts from civil society organizations. In addition, the successful execution of the perpetrators would also deter others from committing such grievous act at various levels. Hence, every stakeholder should as a matter of urgency voice out and condemn this cankerworm.

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