

THE INCREASING RATE OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF WOMEN AND THE GIRL-CHILD BY SOME PASTORS IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The study examines some prevalent sexual abuse of women and the girl child among some pastors in Nigeria. Sexual abuse has become a major concern in some churches and has given rise to a lot of debate as to the role of pastors in evaluating the plight of the masses in Nigerian society. Churches may grow as a direct result of poverty and joblessness. Some pastors falsely proclaim themselves to be prophets while engaging in dishonest and immoral practices. The bulk of the followers and devotees of these male religious leaders are female. They exploit ignorant women who are faced with a lot of problems. Some of these pastors claim to be carrying out God's instructions by calling for deliverance for women and children from demons and evil spirits. While some women were asked to sleep with them in the bid to become pregnant with children, others are duped of their hard-earned money for prayers and spiritual cleans. The paper employed a historical descriptive and analytical method, drawing materials from secondary sources; the secondary source has to do with both published and unpublished materials from the library, books, journals, newspapers, the internet etc. The paper recommends and concludes that there is a need for the government to put in place regulatory bodies to monitor the activities of these pastors and their churches.

Keywords: Girl-Child, Women, Nigeria, Pastor, Sexual Abuse.

1. Introduction

The incessant increase in cases of rape among Pastors in Nigerian society has become very worrisome. Men of God that

should be representative of God and custodians of moral ethics have turned themselves into wolves in sheep's clothing destroying the sheep they are meant to

protect, thereby bringing shame to the body of Christ and the Church of God. Sexual violence against women is widely accepted as a problem in today's communities worldwide. According to Emeka, Odika and Nweke, (2022:77), sexual violence as a growing public health and human rights problem is an indicator of the most severe branch of human security in the world. Other writers like Eze (2013), have highlighted the widespread nature of sexual violence in Nigeria, particularly rape, which targets people of all ages and spares neither minors nor the elderly.

It is important to remember that clergy sexual abuse and misconduct is not an isolated incident but rather a global problem (Swain, 2018; Garland & Argueta, 2010). When members of their congregation are experiencing difficulties in their own lives or the larger community, they typically turn first to their religious leaders for guidance (Bottoms et al., 2004). Generally speaking, religious teachings may help people live happier, more fulfilled lives (Cameron, 2000; Taylor et al., 2000). Relationships between members of a congregation and its clergy that are based on truth, trust, respect, and support provide members of the congregation a great chance to develop personally and strengthen their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Churches have a history of nurturing their communities and offering a safe haven for their members; they also promote positive lifestyle choices among their members (Peterson et al., 2002; Taylor et al., 2000; Cameron, 2000). On the other side, sexual abuse of congregations and supplicants, including minors, by certain religious leaders has raised widespread public concern for their breach of religious, professional, and ethical boundaries. One such sin is mistreating worshippers and those who come to pray (UNICEF, 2014; Firestone et al., 2009). There has been a rise

in political and public scrutiny of sexual misconduct in Christian Organizations in recent years (Death, 2016, 2019; Denney et al., 2018; Lonne & Parton, 2014). Current research documents a wide range of characteristics and profiles of clergy sexual abuse (CPSA). This is what the research shows (NiiBoye et al., 2021).

2 Sexual Abuse in Historical Perspective

Because they represent the future of every society, children have an inherent right to the best possible care, education, and protection. The survival of human civilisation depends on its children more than anything else. There can be no future human civilizations if today's generation does not produce any offspring. However, children are among the most vulnerable members of society. Onwe (2014) argues that several aspects of Nigerian society, including economic inequality, cultural norms, religious prevalence, and unfavourable social situations, pose serious threats to the well-being of the country's children. Children are especially vulnerable to abuse because of their defenselessness. Any kind of crime, abnormality, or cruelty perpetrated by an older generation against a younger, more vulnerable generation might be considered child abuse, as stated by Olok-Ake (2000). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, both approved in 1989, make it clear that mistreating children is a crime. This vice, which is likewise considered abhorrent to any genuine Christian conscience, is unfortunately on the rise in many of Nigeria's smaller and larger cities and towns. Indeed, the trend is rapidly gaining popularity throughout the whole of Nigeria. Every child, even those in Nigeria, has the right to life, and no one has the right to take it away from them. Children

in Nigeria are often placed in perilous circumstances, such as working as peddlers on the streets or highways, doing exploitative labour or acting as domestic help, begging on the streets, early marriage for females, illiteracy, and genital mutilation. Nigeria's federal government and many non-profits have joined forces to address the pervasive issue of child abuse in the country. Unfortunately, child abuse has persisted, and as a result, Christian churches feel obligated to combat the issue.

Sexual abuse of a child happens when an adult makes sexual contact with a youngster to fulfil the adult's personal sexual needs. According to Theoklitou (2012), the involvement of a child in a sexual act that is oriented towards the physical enjoyment or financial benefit of the person doing the act is considered child sexual abuse. Martin (1993) cites the following as forms of child sexual abuse: indecent exposure of a child's genitalia; showing pornographic material to a child; having sexual contact with a child; touching a child's genitalia; viewing a child's genitalia without touching them; and using a child to create child pornography. Sexual abuse of minors also includes non-consensual contact with or observation of genitalia. According to the findings of the National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) conducted in 2008 by the National Statistics Office in Nigeria, more than 25 per cent of Nigerian adolescents had their first encounter with sexual abuse before the age of 5 on average.

Over the course of the past few decades, the violation of women's and children's human rights has come to be regarded on a worldwide basis as a severe social problem and a serious infringement of human rights. Community traditions, customs, and culture play a vital impact in both the fundamental

causes of violence against women and children as well as the elements that contribute to the issue.

The phrase "Gender-Based Violence," abbreviated as "GBV," refers to acts of violence committed against women and girls within the framework of their inferior status in society, characterised by power imbalance both within the family and in society at large. The initials "GBV" may also be used to refer to this term. There is a wide range of GBV that affects women and children at various stages of their lives. Some forms of GBV include CSA (child sexual abuse), early marriage, female genital mutilation, rape, forced prostitution, and spouse abuse. The acronym CSA refers to sexual abuse of children and marriage before the age of 18. Misconduct of this kind also includes the abuse of elderly ladies. "violence against women" (VAW) and "gender-based violence" (GBV) are sometimes used interchangeably, the latter term carries with it a more nuanced meaning. Since this inquiry focused mostly on rapes against women and children, the term "sexual violence" was used throughout. If a man penetrates a woman's genitalia, mouth, or rectum without her permission and uses physical force, threats of physical force, or intimidation to coerce her into sexual activity, he has committed rape. This includes situations when the woman is intoxicated or mentally impaired. Sexual contact that is not consented to by the woman, that is coerced, coerced with the threat of force, or coerced with intimidation or force, or that happens while the victim is in an emotionally or physically vulnerable state are all examples (Abeid, Muganyizi, Olsson, et al. 2014). Between 14 and 25 per cent of all adult women have experienced sexual assault, yet this number may vary from 2 to 62 per cent worldwide.

3 Women and Girls Sexual Assault in Nigeria

Articles on “the tenacity and the tendentious sexual assaults meted out on Nigerian women and the female child” appear in Nigerian news sites almost every day. There were a few instances of:

Someone’s sister or daughter-in-law was raped, someone’s housemaid was raped, someone’s sister or daughter-in-law was raped, etc., as reported by the media. Someone in charge has been sexually abusing staff members... An heir to the traditional monarch has been accused of sexually assaulting one of his subjects (Ciazor et al. 2016:7769; Ogunbode, Bello, & Ogunbode 2014:104).

As the foregoing remark makes apparent, sexual assault by powerful men is a problem in many spheres of Nigerian society. Among them are traditionally patriarchal institutions, the family, the workplace, and the church. Because polygamy is socially sanctioned in Africa’s traditional patriarchal society, men are more likely to abuse their power and resort to sexual violence. Historically, polygamy was seen as a way for a family to gain social status by having many wives. Africans have long maintained the view that a strong family unit is a direct indicator of a leader’s “high regard in the eyes of the society” (Mbiti 1969:142). As a result, wealthy men, particularly the traditional rulers, often engaged in polygamy to boost their social status by “being married to young-looking girls to show off social standing” (cf. Makinde 2004:167; Muthengi 1995:60).

“Sexual abuse of kids is usually done by an adult in a position of authority and trust.” Violence towards women in the home, especially the victim’s wife’s maid or other

female relative, is a common form of this behaviour among males.

The practice of “child marriage,” also known as “the offering in matrimony of children,” is a further kind of abusive masculinity that may lead to sexual assault. Most children under the age of legal majority are not able to give their informed consent to being married; hence forced marriages involving minors are common. “(Ede 2018: online).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002:157), in the World Report on Assault and Health, men engaging in this practice constitute sexual violence against their wives and children since the youngsters are unable to give or withhold permission and have never experienced sex. This is because children in this age group cannot voluntarily offer or withdraw their permission. For example, in the Kebbi state of northern Nigeria, children as young as 11 are married, putting them at risk of sexual abuse (WHO 2002:157).

Church leaders in Nigeria, known as “prophets,” have been exposed for using their followers sexually in a unique way. The fact that some priests sexually abuse the people in their care is old news, as noted by Agazue (2015); however, the fact that such abuse now constitutes a large component of the practice known as “exorcism” is fresh information. In recent instances, the first spark has been the prophet’s use of the victim’s fear of demons or bad spirits who reportedly possess them. The research was carried out to prove such regularities. The so-called prophets convince the victims, who are mostly women, that engaging in sex acts would either protect them from possession by an evil spirit or just enable them to carry out the “will of God.” Fearing failure to execute the “will of God” or possession by demons or evil spirits, and also out of faith and trust in their prophets, churchwomen now commit their bodies to

their prophets so that they may deal with them as they see proper.

There have been allegations of sexual assault occurring even in houses of religion in Nigeria. Since certain church leaders have been accused and convicted of crimes against women, including rape, wife beating, and other violent offences, the saying “some men on the altar are devils dressed as angels” has gained some traction. This is because some pastors and church leaders have been convicted of sexual misconduct (Woman, NG 2017). There are several reports of rape committed by older male church officials (such as choirmasters, youth pastors, and senior pastors) against younger female church members (Ayomide 2019; Woman.NG 2017). According to Agazue (2016), since women have become the preponderant followers of these [neo-Pentecostal] churches, sexual abuse of vulnerable women by their male religious leaders, frequently dubbed prophets, has been routine” (2016: online).

Many male religious leaders have been accused of sexually abusing female members of their flock. Some so-called prophets use “exorcism techniques” that include sexually involved “anointing” of the private areas of women they claim are possessed by witches, mermaids, or sea spirits (Agazue 2015:17). These actions are performed by prophets who engage in exorcism. Some misguided mothers may even give their own daughters or the daughters of their female acquaintances to their pastors for “spiritual cleansing,” which is code for “having sex with church members” (Agazue 2016).

To demonstrate how misleading “Pastors’ promises of “spiritual purity” and the desire to do God’s “will” have become a new avenue for exploiting their female followers for personal gain. “A prophet named Dennis

Mmadu operating out of Lagos sexually exploited a young woman named Cynthia Nwanguma, then 24 years old, for seven days while she was sworn to secrecy. For seven days, Mmadu allegedly anointed her breasts and private part with oil while pretending to have holy intercourse with her in order to cure her of an odd sickness that... would leave her infertile for the rest of her life, as reported by Agazue (2016:online). After physically abusing the student nurse, the prophet then asked that she pay him 21,800 yen for “spiritual purification.” A police investigation was launched and the self-proclaimed prophet was subsequently arrested once his victim realised what had happened and demanded a return of her money from him.

A similar “spiritual washing” took place “between a 37-year-old preacher and his 18-year-old female church member named Mary” in the state of Kogi (Agazue 2016: online). The preacher told Mary that she needed to have the devils in her privates and around her waist cast out before she could have children. If it didn’t happen, she’d never be able to have kids. The pastor told her that sexual activity was necessary to expel the demons, and he forbade her to tell anybody about the process. After Mary prayed over some olive oil,

“he requested me to strip while he [robbed] my waist and private regions with the anointing oil, which had been laced with various drugs,” as Mary put it. He removed his clothes, rubbed the same oil on his privates, and then came down on me to start the action. This is what Mary went through: I was instructed to strip as he prayed into olive oil and then robbed me of my waist and privates (Agazue 2016: online)

Mary’s parents found out she was pregnant and who the “man of God” was when they found out about the pregnancy. They

informed the police and the preacher was taken into custody for questioning. Similarly, several Nigerian women have said that their pastors or other so-called “men of God” have sexually assaulted them while in a position of authority.

4 Conclusion and Recommendation

The report concludes that male church leaders have sexually molested female members of their congregation under the guise of doing God’s will. It has shown a systemic problem of sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by those in positions of power. Many victims fell prey to predators because of the widespread belief that evil spirits or demons possessed them. Some people were quite confident that their sexual interactions were predestined to bring about the “will of God” in their life. Further, research has shown a kind of sexual grooming of teenagers whose parents have put their confidence in or are linked with prophets. For the many women in the church who blindly follow their male pastors because they believe they can do no wrong, this piece should come as a rude awakening. Although it may be challenging to convince such people to stop relying on their pastors’ prophecies, it is advised that they develop more discernment as they consider the claims of their prophets. Church moms, and the women who care for their children, need a better knowledge of the circumstances that may be exacerbating the challenges their families confront. Having access to the material presented in this article might encourage readers to view prophets who accuse them of being possessed and propose the sexual technique of exorcisms with a healthy dose of scepticism.

The study’s results imply that families and (young) female congregants should heed the

warnings that religious leaders who make implausible demands or advise rituals or exorcisms involving nudity or sensuous activities pose a risk of victimisation due to the vulnerability of their followers. This study sheds light on the greater need to streamline and modernize Christian and non-Christian religious organisations’ recruiting, training, and leadership structures. The study also recommends that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) has a role to play in the fight against these predators Pastors that are rubber the name of God in the mud by their behaviour and Acts. The Christian body needs to set machinery on the ground to close down churches that will not heed sound biblical teachings

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