



CURBING THE MENACES OF RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETIES

Abednego Audu Datsau

Systematic and Historical Department, Theological College of Northern Nigeria (TCNN)
Bukuru, (Affiliated to University of Jos), Plateau State

Email: abednegoaudu02@gmail.com; Tel: +2349035910061

Cite this article:

Abednego Audu Datsau (2023). Curbing the Menaces of Rape and Sexual Violence in Contemporary Nigerian Societies. African Journal of Culture, History, Religion and Traditions 6(1), 46-62. DOI: 10.52589/AJCHRT-YAKTJ7AU

Manuscript History

Received: 20 Jan 2023

Accepted: 22 Feb 2023

Published: 27 March 2023

Copyright © 2022 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this research work is to curb the menace of rape and sexual violence in contemporary Nigerian societies. This became necessary because rape and sexual violence are some of the challenges which many suffered from in contemporary Nigerian societies. These vices have gradually become a serious threat to vulnerable people in the country. It is no longer safe for female children and women to walk alone in some places because of the fear of being raped or sexually abused. The findings of the research have shown that there are alarming rate of rape and sexual violence in Nigerian society. For there are many instances in which children, especially female children have been raped on their way to or from school or at home when their parents left for works. Therefore, this problem has done a lot of damage to many female children and women alike. It has also shattered the life of many people, who have been victims of this evil menace. Although people who have been affected by the evil of rape and sexual violence are suffering from the trauma of what happened to them, yet little is being done to curb this menace. This research has shown that this is a pathetic situation that requires urgent attention from all concerned and well-meaning citizens. The major question which this research paper has answered is that: What is it that should be done in order to curb the menace of rape and sexual violence against those who are vulnerable to these inhuman acts in Nigerian societies? While the method that was used in this research is “Random surveys” of cases of rape and sexual violence in Nigeria. The researcher finds it necessary to adopt this method because it is suitable for an objective generalization of the findings. Meanwhile, the theory on which this research hangs is the “Holistic Approach Theory”. The premise of this theory is that curbing the menace of rape and sexual violence in contemporary Nigerian societies requires the collective efforts of the community, the church, the government, civil society/NGOs, mass media and that of the concern citizens. The research presupposes that unless all efforts are collectively put together, it will be difficult to fight these evils that have ravaged our societies.*

KEYWORDS: Curbing, Menace, Rape, and Sexual Violence.



INTRODUCTION

Rape and sexual violence are vices that are increasingly becoming prevalent in the contemporary Nigerian societies. The cases of rape and sexual violence are gradually becoming so rampant and have formed major issues of concern that need to be nib to the barest minimum. It is disturbing to find out that it is no longer safe for female children and women to walk alone in some places because of the fear of being raped or sexually abused. Many of our societies have become sexually perverted to the extent that the human environment is no longer safe for those who are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Today, parents and guardians are afraid of what might happen to their children and wards on their way to school or when they are left alone at home. This is because there are many instances in which children, especially female children have been raped on their way to or from school or at home when their parents left for works.

It is quite unfortunate to find out that African society where communal life, mutual love, peace, and security is supposed to be seen and enjoyed is now been characterized by all sorts of crimes against humanity, which include rape and sexual violence. The problem which this paper sought to address is the alarming rate of rape and sexual violence in Nigerian society. This problem has done a lot of harm to female children and women alike. It is disheartening to find out that rape and sexual violence has shattered the life of many people, especially women. Although people who are vulnerable to the crime of rape and sexual violence are living in fear and uncertainty of what might happen to them in their environment, yet little is being done to curb this menace. Even though the vulnerable has the right to dignity of human person, and the right to live a life that is free from such threats, yet these rights have been dashed in many of our societies. It is unfortunate to find out that people who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence in many of our societies are helpless and hopeless in spite of the fact that they too are fellow citizens who have equal right with those who victimize them. This, therefore, is a pathetic situation that requires urgent attention from all concerned and well-meaning citizens.

The aim of this research work is to curb the menace of rape and sexual violence in contemporary Nigerian societies. This became necessary because it is considerably possible to curb this menace when deliberate and collective efforts are taken. In view of this, the major question which this research paper has answered is that: What is it that should be done in order to curb the menace of rape and sexual violence against those who are vulnerable to these inhuman acts in Nigerian societies? Meanwhile, the method that was used in this research is the “random surveys” of cases of rape and sexual violence in Nigeria. The researcher finds it necessary to adopt this method because it is suitable for an objective generalization of the findings.

Besides, the theory on which this research hangs is the “Holistic Approach Theory.” The premise of this theory is that curbing the menace of rape and sexual violence in contemporary Nigerian societies requires the collective efforts of the community, the church, the government, civil Society/NGOs, mass media and that of the concern citizens. The research presupposes that unless all efforts are collectively put together, it will be difficult to fight these evils that have ravaged our societies.



CASES OF RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

Reports from the government, non-governmental organizations, police records, media, and individuals have shown that rape and sexual violence are shocking realities in Nigerian societies and world at large. Achunike and Kitause say that: “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” (31). This is a global epidemic that affects both the genders, however, women and children, most especially female children are the ones mostly affected. The most unfortunate part of this story according to Chiedu quoted by Achunike and Kitause is that:

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 a 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 (32).

Punch News Paper online version has reported that the Lagos State Government on Tuesday said that “No fewer than 150 cases of sexual and physical abuses reported in the state in the last one year” (Zovoe par. 2). This was disclosed by the Commissioner for Youth and Social Development Mrs Uzamat Akimbile-Yussuf at a ministerial news conference on Tuesday, April 26, 2016 in Ikeja, Lagos. In the same newspaper, it has been reported that the Director of the Office of Public Defender, Mrs. OmotolaRotimi at the 2015 press week organized by the Lagos State Governor’s Office Correspondence had expressed concern over the growing cases of rape. She said that between January and September last year, the OPD handled about 70 child defilement cases and 406 rape cases. She added that 1,143 related cases were treated in 2007 till then (Zovoe par. 5 and 6).

Besides, TAMAR Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Enugu, on Wednesday April 20, 2016 according to Zovoe in the same report, has revealed that it has received 472 separate cases of sexual assault in Enugu State since 2014. The report shows that there were 14 cases of attempted rape, 37 domestic violence-related sexual assault, 42 cases involved children below five years, 86 incidents affected children between six and ten years, while those from 11-13 years victims were 73. 81 cases teenagers from 14-17 years, 86 incidents involved those from 18-22 years, while 73 involved youth from 23-29, and 31 report cases involved 30 years and above (Zovoe par. 7-9). In another related report according to the Executive Director, Women Aid Collective, Mrs. Ezeilo, that available records have shown that 86 victims were gang rape (Zovoe par. 10).

In a related case, Vanguard News online version reports that Governor Akinwunmi Ambode of Lagos State led celebrities and members of his cabinet to embark on an all-male march against rape, child abuse and other domestic violence related cases, aimed at curbing the act in the state. The reporters disclosed that “The march came barely few days after the state government disclosed that over 700 rape, child abuse and other domestic violence related cases were pending in court and that between June 2015 and May, this year, the state recorded a total of 4, 035 cases in related matters” (Olowojo and Chukwudipar. 1). Ambode, who led the protesters after their arrival at the State House, was armed with placards such as, ‘LAS GIDI



Men say no to abuse, violence against women’, ‘Women are not object respect and treat them right’, ‘Stop rape and abuse’ among others. Addressing other participants, the governor said

The aim behind the search for the first 11 is to prosecute, even if they were influential residents, was to serve as deterrent to others. According to him, “It is time we take the bull by the horn in tackling this menace of sexual and gender based violence in our society. There is also an evident trend of suppressing the voice of these victims due to the fact that these acts are perpetrated largely by men (OLowoopeju and Chukwudi par. 1).

In a research carried out between March 2020 and August 2021, Amnesty International researchers report that rape has continued to be one of the most prevalent human rights violations in Nigeria. The Amnesty International report said in June 2020, Nigerian police had recorded 717 incidents of rape between January and May last year. Besides, In April 2020, Nigeria’s Minister of Women Affairs Pauline Tallen said that “at least 3,600 cases of rape were recorded during the lockdown, while the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) received 11,200 reported cases of rape over the whole of 2020 (Ugbodaga np). The alarming rate of rape and sexual violence is what led Nigeria state governors to declare a “state of emergency” on rape and gender-based violence in June 2020 where they promised to set up a sex offenders’ register.

According to the report “One victim, Vera Uwaila Omosuwa, a 22-year-old microbiology student, was raped and brutally assaulted in 2020 in a church near her home in Benin, Edo state, and died a couple of days later from her injuries. Hamira, a five-year-old, was drugged and raped by her neighbour in April 2020. Her injuries were so bad that it resulted to VVI. In addition, “Barakat Bello, an 18-year-old student, was raped during a robbery in her home in Ibadan, Oyo state. She was butchered with machetes by her rapists and died on 1 June 2020. More so, an 11-year-old girl called Favour Okechukwu, was gang-raped to death in Ejigbo, Lagos state. While a 70-year-old woman was raped in Ogun state. In May 2021, a six-year-old girl was raped to death in Kaduna state (Ugbodaga np). Statistic has shown that “about 3 in 10 Nigerians (26 per cent) disclosed that they know someone who has been raped in the past and the rape victims were particularly minors and young adults aged between 1 – 15 years (72 per cent) and 16 – 25 years (24 per cent) respectively. This statistic implies that one in every three girls would have experienced at least one form of sexual abuse by the time they reach 25 years” (“Sexual violence: Why the Rise?” in Reliefweb.int). The above have clearly shown that rape and sexual violence has been a reality which Nigeria is battling with; it is indeed an ugly painful reality that requires urgent action.

FACTORS THAT LEADS TO RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sex related crimes are common in many of our societies today because of considerable numbers of factors which include:

Peer Group Pressure/Influence: Peer group is playing a major role in the increase of rape and sexual violence in Nigerian society and world at large. According to Achunike and Kitause many young adolescents have been lured into committing the crime of rape by their peer groups. Many young people have been deceived to commit this heinous act because they want to gain the approval and acceptance of their peers (34).



Myths about Sex: The many myths about sex that are common in our societies have considerably contributed to the rate at which rape is on increase nowadays. For instance, many people have been deceived to believe that when a person who is infected with HIV has sexual intercourse with a virgin, he will be healed. As a result of such myth many HIV victims have resorted to this crime in order to be cured of this virus (Achunike and Kitause 35).

Exposure to Pornographic Materials: We are living in a time in which advancement in science and technology have exposed many young people to pornography; today many young people have free access to read sex books, magazines, and also watch pornographic movies. Pam says that “Pornography is one of the causes of rape. Rape is fueled by pornography. Most rapists are constantly in touch with ex-rated pornographic books, magazines and movies” (98). As a result of this exposure many young people have been tempted to try it by raping others. George and Ukpong also says pornography is one of the “negative impacts of science and technology which threaten to destroy our society and also serves as spring boards for the proliferation of rape and sexual violence” (168).

Cultism: Cultism is said to be one of the dreadful and horror sects in Nigeria. George and Ukpong say that “The occultic group or cultic activities are animal in nature and also morally wrong and has tremendous negative effects on the society. Their activities include killing, robbery, rape, drug abuse...” (170).

Influence of Indecent Dressing: The indecent dressing that often exposes some sensitive parts of women’s bodies is said to be one of the factors that lead to rape and sexual violence. Achinuke and Kitause say that “Indecent dressing can engineer desire culminating in sexual seduction” (35). Okoroafor and Umoh rightly say “The steady decline of cultural values, especially as it pertains to sartorial decorum among female students (some female students dress worse than high-class prostitutes) has also contributed to [rape and sexual violence]” (11). Okpara, according to Achinuke and Kitause opines that “Ladies attract men by wearing sexy or transparent dresses” (35). Africa Polling Institute (API) and Heart Minders Advancement Initiative release a collaborative Survey Report on Rape and Sexual Abuse on Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria in 2019. The survey report, which focused on six tertiary institutions in Lagos state shows that 63% of respondents (who are themselves students) ascribed the prevalence to the increased rate of “Inappropriate and indecent dressing”, especially by female students on campuses (Ihua par. 6). A survey by Ayogu also shows that:

Even some parents buy clothes for their children to wear with such negative “inscriptions 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.” 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 (Achinuke and Kitause quoted Ayogu 35).

The Culture of Silence: The culture of silence about the crime of rape and sexual violence is one of the contributing factors to the alarming rate of this crime. It is said that “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” (35). Besides, people tend to conceal rape cases from the law enforcement agents in order to protect their relationship with the family of the perpetrator; this is common when the rapist is a family friend. This culture of silence has given some people the courage to commit this crime since



many have done it and have gone scot-free. It is promising to see that according to Badru in Vanguard News online version A Non-Governmental Organisation, HACEY Health initiative in partnership with Access Bank have warned people to desist from stigmatising victims, especially women of sexual-based violence, noting that such treatment will further add to their pains and discourage them from opening up for medical treatment and justice (Vanguard News).

Failure of Law Enforcement: Although there are laws at federal and some state that have been enacted in order to curb the crime of rape and sexual violence, yet the laws are not been enforced as expected. For instance, the House of Representatives on Tuesday March 5, 2013 approved life imprisonment for any person convicted of rape, a minimum of 20 years imprisonment for persons convicted of gang rape, and thereafter, the Senate passed similar bill in order to control the alarming rate of rape in Nigeria, yet it has been observed that “Enacting laws are not enough; what is more important is the enforcement of the law to protect those it is supposed to protect” (Akumadu quoted by Achinuke and Kitause 36-37). Olukemi and Folakemi posit that “Observation of the mishandling of past sexual violence cases by law enforcement agents, where the promulgated law against offenders were not effectively implemented may hinder victim from reporting because sexual violence policy may seem to largely influence whether survivor will report an attack or not” (34-35). They further said that National Crime and Safety survey has recorded that

Police’s insensitivity discouraged most survivors from reporting while majority of those who reported were not satisfied with the handling of the cases. The insensitive and traumatic treatments victims experience with the police and criminal justice system in Nigeria would discourage whoever wants to disclose sexual assault. Mistrust about the official to whom an assault is reported do add to the victim’s reluctance to report (Olukemi and Folakemi 35).

Amnesty International researchers report that “Some survivors said they were discouraged from seeking justice because of the toxic attitude of police officers towards gender-based violence, which manifested in humiliating lines of questioning and victim-blaming. In addition, decrepit police stations often lack the space for privacy that survivors need to make their statements (Ugbodaga). The report also said that “Activists and lawyers have decried the poor quality of police investigations into rape cases. In some cases, perpetrators bribe the police not to investigate their crimes. The police have also advised survivors and perpetrators to settle cases outside the scope of the criminal justice system, which only perpetuates violations of women’s human rights and impunity for rape,” (Ugbodaga).

Poverty and Economic Factors: Poor women and girls may be vulnerable to rape and sexual violence because poverty has forced many of them into works that expose them to sexual exploitation. For example, according to World Report on Violence and Health “Poverty forces many women and girls into occupations that carry relatively high risk of sexual violence” (Sexual Violence 158).

Moral Decadence: The decline in moral values is resulting to some cases of rape and sexual violence in many of our societies today. This moral decline has led to many parents raping their biological children, uncles, brothers and cousins committing incestuous rape against their close relatives. This has also led to many cases of pastors raping members, including little children (Achinuke and Kitause 37).



Alcohol and Drug Consumption: Increase vulnerability to rape and sexual violence could also be as a result of the use of alcohol and hard drugs by both the victims and the perpetrators. Consuming alcohol and hard drugs has led many women to be weak and helpless, thereby exposing themselves to be easily raped. Besides, some men under the influence of drugs and alcohol have committed this crime (Sexual Violence 158).

Other Factors: Factors that lead to rape are numerous depending on what motivates the rapists. Other factors that contribute to this menace are rituals, kidnapping, wicked intentions and so on. For example people rape virgins, mad women and children for ritualistic purposes, and some HIV infected persons rape women and children with the evil intention to transmit the virus to them.

EFFECTS OF RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

It is well documented and widely accepted that rape causes severe physical and psychological pain and suffering to the victim. It is an undisputable fact that rape can have serious physical, psychological and reproductive consequences for the victims, including death, unwanted pregnancies, complications in childbirth, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (Nigeria: Rape –the Silence Weapon par. 4). Furthermore, rape and sexual violence destroys the victim's self-worth. Forward and Buck quote an incest victim describing how she feels about herself that "Think of the lowest thing in the world. What it is, I'm lower" (Penner quoted Forward and Buk 233). Penner says that "The victim of abuse has an incredibly low view of herself. Her self-worth can be so low that she does not want to live. Suicidal impulses are common, especially for the victim of incest. These impulses reflect how worthless the individual feels" (233).

Women and Justice outline the following negative effects which girls who are sexually abused face: chronic lack of confidence, avoidance of closeness, intense feelings of shame, intense feelings of guilt, social withdrawal, suicidal tendencies, addictions, sexual problems, and chronic health problems like vaginal infections, cancer of the reproductive organs, infertility, and sexually transmitted diseases (24). It is indeed right to assert that rape and sexual violence is a crime that terribly hurts its victims. It is like "Stabbing a heart and leaving the knife there" (Achunike and Kitause quoted Kayode 37). Alhassan also captures the consequences of rape 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 sexuality and inability to form or maintain trusting relationships are common (Achunike and Kitause37).

Olukemi and Folakemi opine that:

The detrimental effect of sexual violence on the health of the survivor is enormous. Survivor could experience physical health problems arising from the likely changes in sleeping and eating habit that may accompany sexual violence. In addition, victim of sexual violence maybe predisposed to gynaecological injuries such as genital-analtrauma and other likely physical



injuries. Likewise, issue of elevated sexually transmitted infection such as syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, herpes simplex virus, human papilloma and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) may occur among survivor of rape. Also, sexual violence in form of rape may result into genital injuries and untreated infection arising from rape could aggravate to pelvic inflammatory disease, urinary tract infection or ascending infection affecting the reproductive organs. In addition, rape or incest could result into unwanted pregnancy (32).

CURBING THE MENACES FOR THE SEXUALLY VULNERABLE

A Need for Advocacy

We are living in a society in which the voice of the ordinary person is not easily heard. Those in power trampled upon the rights of ordinary persons and no one seems to say anything. Even though the plight of those who are sexually abused is obvious, yet there seems to be no one who will stand for them and fight their case. Nevertheless, it is necessary to say that since the society seems to give deaf ears to the plights of the victims of sexual abuse, there is need for those whose voices could be heard to come out and speak on their behalf. Maton in her book *Advocacy and the Bible* posits that “Advocacy ensures that a balance is maintained in our society, because it tries to curtail the excesses in our interpersonal relationship, especially where the weak are at the mercy of the strong, mighty and rich like small fish before the big fish. It is the only avenue where the weak come to be helped and defended” (33). She further buttresses that

When there is no advocacy evil, injustice and wickedness lingers on in the society from generation to generation to a point that it might become a norm, but when advocacy is engaged in, it becomes the consciousness of the society, because it keeps its conscience alive through a reminder that such practices are evil and God might visit it with his wrath and judgment (33).

Therefore when the Community, the Church, the Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations take this task of advocacy very serious it will go alone way in “dispensing justice to the hurts and the abused” whose voice could not be heard even when they cry out (Maton33). Advocacy should never be seen as the responsibility of some few individuals, but it should be everybody’s business. Pedro is right when she asserts that “Advocacy is part of an integrated communication strategy, which also included media and social mobilization, with many stakeholders, in order to enroll institutions and community networks to strengthen their participation on problems related to gender (13). Good advocacy is expected to “inform and motivate appropriate leaders to create a supportive environment by taking action, such as changing policies (legal reform or enactment of new laws), allocating resources (funding, social or political alliances, or mobilizing resources)” (Pedro 4).

It is important to note at this point that the art of advocacy campaign should not be carried out without the target audience in mind. In fact, it is necessary to carry out advocacy with the key agents in view. Speaking about the key agents for effective advocacy in a case study carried out in Timor-Leste, Pedro quoted Drezin and Lloyd-Laney that

Key agents are those who must make the change, often policy makers or opinion leaders, the latter with a great influence in Timor-Leste. Depending on the strategy, they might consist of the male perpetrators who must curb their violent behaviour, the courtroom judges and police



officers who need to be more gender-sensitive or the journalists who need to cover GBV in a more equitable and accurate manner. But they also consist of those who benefit from the changes. They are women and girls, victims and others that live in low sensitive-gender communities. The target audience should be often who works to bring change, such as NGOs and women's organizations, government, donors, United Nations System (missions and agencies) and other partners whose support should be helpful to achieve the campaign's objectives (7).

The Role of the Community in the Fight against Rape and Sexual Violence

The community has a vital role to play in creating a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to rape and other sexual violence. The community should come out and speak against it, and make every effort to protect its members from this abuse, for "No community can stand strong if it is built on insecurity and aggression" (*Women and Justice* 27). Besides, the community should endeavor to handover the perpetrators to relevant authority for proper action to be taken against them. It is said that

Without people a community would not exist and without being a part of community people would not exist well. So the community must take care of its people just as people must take care of their community. Pretending that abuse is not occurring will not help the community... Preventing people from talking about abuses such as child sexual abuse and rape of women do not in the end help the victims, their families or their communities (*Women and Justice* 21).

Furthermore, the community should encourage morality among its citizens and be ready to abolish all practices and myths that promote rape and sexual violence. The idea that women are inferior members of the community who could be treated any how should be discouraged. Relatively, human dignity should be upheld. Moreover, women should not be looked upon as sex objects but married men should know that sex is for mutual enjoyment. When this is known this will help in curtailing rape in marriage. The culture of silence about sexual abuse that has dominated many of our societies should be discouraged. Instead people should be encouraged to speak against such evil. The culture that forced women to undermine their dreadful and painful experience of rape in order to maintain peace in the family should be totally discouraged. It is important to say in the words of Maton that "The home, school and the church should be secure for our sisters, there is need to protect them by providing an environment of safety for them. Such environment may never see the light of the day if all of us conspire into silence about sexual violence directed towards our women and girl-children" (37). A report from World Health Organization says that:

From a public health perspective, community and societal factors may be the most important for identifying ways to prevent sexual violence before it happens, since society and culture may support and perpetuate beliefs that condone violence. Factors linked to higher rates of men's perpetration of sexual violence include: traditional gender and social norms related to male superiority (e.g. that sexual intercourse is a man's right in marriage, that women and girls are responsible for keeping men's sexual urges at bay or that rape is a sign of masculinity); and weak community and legal sanctions against violence (*Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women* 6).



From the above submission, it means as earlier stated that if community will abolish all the unhealthy practices that promotes rape and sexual violence and weak community and legal sanction it will help in creating a secure environment for the sexually vulnerable.

The Role of the Church in the Fight against Rape and Sexual Violence

The church, being an agent of transformation, has a vital role to play in creating a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence. The church is expected to be actively involved in curbing the crime of rape and sexual violence that is so rampant in many of our societies. In order to create a secure environment for the vulnerable, the church is expected to proclaim in its messages the dignity of human person. Iwe and Onah, quoted by Achinuke and Kitause posit that church should preach “the Gospel of the fundamental dignity of the person and the equality of all human beings in rights and duties” (38). This means that when the greater numbers of people in the society are saturated with this teaching, the sexually vulnerable persons will not be treated as lesser beings that could be violated sexually. If someone attempts to do that the entire community will come out and condemn the act.

Besides this, the church should work toward promoting morality that is gradually losing its place in our contemporary society. The church, being the Light and Salt of the earth (cf. Matthew 5:13-16), should emphasize the need to see these manifesting in the lives of all its members. When the world sees the light of the Gospel and taste its seasoning power in the way believers live their lives, it will go a long way in curbing the evil of rape and sexual violence that is prevalent in many of our societies today. However, if believers are deeply involved in rape and sexual violence, it is going to be very difficult to convince the world of its evil. In this regard the church should endeavor to condemn the indecent dressing that is common among many Christian ladies and young men today.

In addition, the church as agent of transformation should put more effort in transforming some of the cultural beliefs and practices that are promoting rape and sexual violence in our societies. For instance, *Punch News* online version reported that a man from Malawi named Eric Ariva infected more than 100 adolescent girls with HIV during a sexual cleansing ritual. The most unfortunate side of the story is that this man was paid by the girls’ parents in order to perform this ritual on their innocent girls at their first menstruation. This harmful cultural and traditional practice is being practiced with the belief to “train girls to become good wives and to protect them from disease or misfortune that could fall on their families or their village” (HIV-infected Man... par. 4).

It has been reported that “Churches in Nigeria through her sermons have been preserving the moral principles of the society as well as making contributions to the development of some cultural and social life” that is in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scripture (Achinuke and Kitause 38). It is promising to find out that some churches in Nigeria are said to be proactive in their fight against rape and sexual violence. For instance the Catholic Church is said to be involved in teaching, sensitizing, creating awareness campaign and advocacy against rape and sexual violence (Achinuke and Kitause 38). In the Anglican Church it is said that “The Church has always been watching over the youths, who are vulnerable and guiding them so as not to become easy prey to rapists” (Achinuke and Kitause 38). This effort is equally obtainable in many denominations. Nonetheless, more effort should be put in this great task in order to create a secure environment to our fellows who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence.



The Role of Civil Societies and Non-Governmental Organizations

It is important to say that Civil Societies and Non-Governmental Organizations have vital roles and have been playing vital roles in curtailing the crime of rape and sexual violence in Nigeria. Achinuke and Kitause said that over the years they have responded to the problem of rape in many ways which include: Intensification of advocacy on the protection of human rights by insisting that victims of rape be given ample time to prosecute their case in the law Courts, filing and sponsoring rape cases on behalf of rape victims as well as fighting for better legal reforms such as upgrading of obsolete laws (40). They further recommend that Civil Societies and NGOs should initiate elaborate enlightenment campaigns against rape and dispelling sex myths in Nigeria using the media, they should continue to extol the virtues of gender equality as well as promoting sexual abuse prevention programmes in the society (40). It is promising to find out that The Yosi Apollos Maton (YAM) BERACAH Foundation is one of the foundations whose aims and objective is to create a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to sexual abuse. Some of the Aims and Objective of the foundation reads:

1. Seek out the sexual abused and sexual disorient youths and extend healing and restoration to them.
2. To advocate for the sexually abused children and girls and help them rediscover themselves.
3. To be a living voice in our permissive society by making the society conscious of sexual abused children and to defend the rights of children to be treated with dignity
4. To help in the reduction and possible eradication of sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy and the abortion.
5. To protect the girl-child from sexual abuse, early marriage and discrimination (Maton 37-38).

Amnesty International has made the following recommendations to Civil Society/NGOs on their roles in the fight against rape and sexual violence and other related Gender-Based Violence:

1. Work to create an environment that supports women and addresses violence against women, including by raising awareness through the media; building community structures and processes to protect women; and providing assistance to victims of violence;
2. Demand that women be treated as equal members of the community, including having equal participation in decision-making in local government, customary legal systems and community structures;
3. Call on religious bodies and traditional authorities to respect women's human rights, and to denounce and desist from any action that encourages or tolerates violence against women in general and in the family specifically;
4. Combat negative images of women and work to challenge discriminatory attitudes that foster violence against women and girls, for example in the mass media, advertisements;



5. Call on communities to work with those most affected to develop and implement local strategies to confront violence against women (Rape- the Silence Weapon 14).

The Role of Home Front in the Fight against Rape and Sexual Violence

Parents respond differently to the cases of rape. While some parents would speak out and seek the intervention of relevant authority, others will prefer to remain silent because of the influence of the culture of silence. Nevertheless, in our effort to create a secure environment for the sexually vulnerable, parents have vital roles to play. These roles according to Achunike and Kitause include meeting the emotional needs of their children to enable them feel free to share the struggles and challenges they have encountered in life. Besides, parents should be very vigilant and closely observing their children and any sign of vulnerability and abuse. Furthermore, parents should be very careful about entrusting their children in the hands of people they do not trust. Additionally, they should create enough time to give definite instruction about life and how to relate with peers (opposite sex), teachers, neighbors, close relations and a stranger (Achinuke and Kitause quo. Litchfield and Litchfield 39).

The Role of Mass Media in the Fight against Rape and Sexual Violence

Media who is said to be the eye, ear and limbs of the society have a vital role to play in creating a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence. As the proverbial watch dog of the society media can greatly help in containing the menace of rape and sexual violence mostly meted against children and women. The media is expected to be more aware of society's cultural practices, ills and evils that promote rape and sexual violence in order to expose them and creates awareness that will help in curtailing them. Sarup posits that "Media also have a duty to report accurately an act of violence against women [...] media should highlight injustices meted out to women by the male dominated society" (par. 3). Just as media had greatly helped in the fight against human rights violations and in promoting human rights in different social contexts, she is expected to act as a pressure group against rape and sexual violence.

In its effort to create a secure environment for the sexually vulnerable persons media is expected to expose and generate awareness about the ills and evils of rape and sexual violence using the mirror of journalism it has in place (Sarup par. 10). The media is required to engage in investigative journalism" in order to have all the facts that will enable her win the battle against the rapists and sexual violators (Omega 92). Besides this, the media should play the role of advocacy in its fight against rape and sexual violence. Omega opines that "The media can also adopt advocacy journalism that may put an end to the abduction, killings and rape of our girls and women thereby achieving the most needed peace in the society" (92).

Furthermore, the media needs to create awareness for people who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence in order to help them know their rights and how to find legal help in fighting for their rights. Meanwhile, the media should help the human rights activists in their fight against rape and sexual violence that is prevalent in many of our societies, and also help the government on how to create awareness and implement projects that will help in combating this menace.

Since public awareness campaign has immensely helped in changing the attitudes and behaviors of people over the time, the mass media needs to employ diverse and holistic



channels of communication in order to reach out to a greater number of audiences. Pedro posits that

A great message needs a great communication channel to make the difference when reaching intended audience. The communication expert responsible for the campaign has then to choose different channels for each audience. Creativity should be the final ingredient for a successful campaign [...] Experience has shown that mixed communication channels are more appropriate and potent when message is sent out than one single channel. Besides, each communication channel has positive and negative factors by the time of choosing them: who is more likely to be reached, number of people reached, message medium, among others. The communication practitioners have, therefore, to pick and choose a mix of channels to convey the right message to the right people in a most effective and cost efficient way (Pedro quo. Owen *et al.* 24).

Pedro further says that “For this to work, communication professionals need to acknowledge the full context before planning” (29). This means that mass media practitioners need to study their target audience very well to enable them choose channels of communication that will make their campaigns for creating a secure environment for sexually vulnerable persons a huge success.

The Role of the Government in the Fight against Rape and Sexual Violence

It is important to say that governing authorities have vital roles to play in the fight against rape and sexual violence. If Nigerian government will put in place the right policy, enact laws and execute them as spelt out in the Constitution, then this country will make headway in creating a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to the menace of rape and sexual violence. However, it has been observed that the “definitions of rape in national legislation continue to be inadequate and there are considerable differences between the different definitions (between federal, state, Sharia and customary law) leading to arbitrary decisions concerning the seriousness of this crime” (Nigeria Rape –the Silence Weapon 8).

In its report Ipas Nigeria said that A federal law, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, was enacted in 2015 in response to the longstanding problem of gender-based violence in Nigeria. Yet only 16 of 36 states have thus far adopted legislation needed to implement the VAPP Act at the state level. In view of this Lucky Palmer, director of Ipas Nigeria, says “State-level action is critical, State laws will provide the legal framework needed to both punish the perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence and to provide survivors with comprehensive sexual and reproductive services and care if needed.”

Although there are laws that have been put in place in order to contain this menace in the Penal Code, Criminal Code and Sharia Penal Code in Nigeria, yet it is important to say that curtailing the problem of rape and sexual violence does not depend largely on laws and policies that have been put in place, rather, the enforcement of the laws really matters. If the law enforcement agency like the police who have been saddled with the responsibility of defending the civil society did not put more effort in protecting the citizens through intensified patrol and prompt intervention when cases of rape is reported to them, creating a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence is going to be difficult (Gbemileke and Oladepo 118).



Amnesty International's recommendations to Nigerian authorities, judicial, legal officials and law enforcement agency have greatly shaded light on what the government should do in order to create a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence.

The Federal Government should

1. State unambiguously that violence against women, including rape, is prohibited by law, and initiate public education programmes on ending violence against women;
2. Convey to all state actors that rape is a crime, which may amount to torture;
3. Systematically and comprehensively document violence against women, including rape, and make this information publicly available;
4. Ensure that all women who have been subjected to violence, including rape, have access to redress in the form of access to justice; and to reparations including compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition;
5. Bring all perpetrators of gender-based violence, including rape, to justice in trials that conform to international fair trial standards and exclude the death penalty; and facilitate private criminal prosecutions by non-governmental organizations and others in cases of rape;
6. Incorporate urgently into domestic law the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which Nigeria ratified in 1985;
7. Reform legislation to incorporate, at a minimum, the definition of rape;
8. Urgently make public the report and the recommendations of the Committee on the Review of Discriminatory Laws Against Women and make public plan for how to implement the recommendations;
9. Ensure that punishments prescribed for rape are commensurate with the gravity of the crime, and exclude the death penalty. If necessary, amend sentencing guidelines for judges;
10. Urgently reform discriminatory legislation and ensure that all legislation complies fully with Nigeria's obligations under international human rights law;
11. Repeal the Public Officers Protection Act in order to ensure that it does not prevent or hinder prosecution of state actors alleged to have committed rape;
12. Provide gender-sensitivity training to the police and security forces, judges and other officials in the criminal justice system, and lawyers; such training should include protection of women from rape; investigation of reports of rape; prosecution of such cases, including protection of victims and witnesses;
13. Ensure that women and girls are able to report to women police officers when reporting gender-based violence;
14. Ensure effective separation of men and women in prisons, police stations and all other places of detention;



15. Provide adequate resources for a sufficient number of appropriate shelters for women, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations working to protect women from violence;
16. Address factors contributing to the prevalence of violence against women by taking measures to promote equality of women, and counter women's impoverishment by ensuring equal access to economic and social rights, including education, freedom of movement, property, employment and social entitlements and by political participation;
17. Ensure that women human rights defenders are able to freely exercise their work without harassment, intimidation or hindrance;
18. Ensure that organizations working on sexual and gender-based violence are involved in the drawing up of programs, services, policies and management tools and the monitoring and evaluation of government action to address the needs of the survivors;

(Rape- the Silence Weapon 12-13).

Besides, *Daily Trust* online version reports that “the government must also initiate and support services and policies that enhance children's development, health and safety. We must advocate for policies and programs to help meet the basic needs of children and families to help parents and stop being forced by abject poverty to send their children to cities for exploitation” (The Scariest of Sexual Violence Cases in Nigeria).

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that rape and sexual violence is one of the major problems which Nigeria and the global community are struggling to overcome. This problem has become so devastating that it has made the environment to be scaring and unfavorable for people who are vulnerable to it. This devastating situation is the main issue that has prompted the researchers to carry out a research which aims at creating a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence in Nigerian society. Since rape and sexual violence is a phenomenon that is caused by many predisposed factors, the researchers felt that an all-round efforts need to be put together in order to successfully fight it. It is only when this is done that secure environment will be provided for its victims. Therefore, this paper claims that when the efforts of the community, home front, Civil Societies/NGOs, the Church and the government are put together in the fight against rape and sexual violence it will go a long way in providing a secure environment for those who are vulnerable to this menace.

WORKS CITED

- Achunike, Hilary Chukwuka and Kitause, Rimamsikwe. “Rape Epidemic in Nigeria: Cases, Causes, Consequences and Responses.” *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Science* 2.1 (2014): 31-44.
<http://www.impactjournals.us/download.php?...RAPE%20EPIDEMIC%20IN%20NIGERIA>. Accessed on 29/9/2016



- Adetokunbo, Solomon Samuel. "Menace of Child Abuse: A Television Documentary Production." Degree Project. University of Lagos, 2013. [http://www.academia.edu/...](http://www.academia.edu/) Accessed on 31/10/2016.
- Allender, Dan B. *The Wounded Heart*. Farnham: CWR, 1991.
- "As sexual violence continues to rise in Nigeria, Ipas and partners advocate for state-level protections". *Ipas Nigeria*. 6 Aug. 2020. <https://www.ipas.org/news/as-sexual-violence-continues-to-rise-in-nigeria-ipas-and-partners-advocate-for-state-level-protections/>
- Badru, Adeola. "Stakeholders Tackle Stigmatisation of Sexual Violence Victims." *Vanguard*. 30 Aug. 2022. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/stakeholders-tackle-stigmatisation-of-sexual-violence-victims/>
- Gbemileke, A. and Oladebo O. "A Five-Year Analysis of Police Records on Sexual-related Offences in Lagos State, Nigeria." *African Journal of Biomedical Research* 18 (2015): 109-121. <http://www.ajo.info/index.php/ajbr/article/viewfile/118492/108023>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- George, I.N. and Ukpong, D.E. "Contemporary Social Problems in Nigeria and Its Impact on National Development: Implication for Guidance and Counseling Services." *Journal Education and Social Research* 5.2 (2013): 167-173. <http://www.ntu.ac.uk/wellbeing-2013>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- "HIV-infected Man Paid to have Sex with 100 Children Arrested." *Punch Newspaper*. July 26, 2016. <http://punch.com>. Accessed on 31/10/2016.
- Ihua, Bell. "Rape and Sexual Abuse in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria." *Africa Polling Institute (API) and Heart Minders Advancement Initiative*. <https://africapolling.org/2019/12/10/rape-and-sexual-abuse-in-tertiary-institutions-in-nigeria/>
- Iyang, Mfrekemfon and Linda, NwakwaolaChidi. "Rape and the Girl Child." *IOSR Journal of Dental and Medical Sciences* 14.1 (2015): 52-53. <http://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jdms/papers/vol14-issue/version-4/MO14145256.pdf>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- Maton, Yosi. *Advocacy and the Bible*. Jos: Sele Printing & Publishing House, 2013. "Nigeria: Rape- the Silent Weapon." <http://www.refworld.org/pdf.d/45a2479c2.pdf>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- Okoroafor, P.E.N., Umoh, S.I. and Ojinma, C.C. "Gender Based Violence in Nigeria: The Case of Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions." *Journal of Research & Method in Education* 4.2 (2014): 10-15. <http://www.isorjournal.org/iosr-jrme/papers/vol-4%20issues-2/version...c04221015.pdf>. accessed on 29/9/2016.
- Olukemi, Awosusi Ajoke and Folakemi, Ogundana C. "Culture of Silence and Wave of Sexual Violence in Nigeria." *AASCIT Journal of Education* 1.3 (2015): 31-37. <http://article.aascit.org/file/pdf/9730731.pdf>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- Olowoapejo, Monsuru and Chukwudi, Amarachi. "Ambode Leads March against Rape." *Vanguard News*. September 9, 2016. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/09/ambode-leads-march-rape>. Accessed on 8/10/2016.
- Omega, Christie U. "The Role of Mass Media in the Fight against Terrorism and the Instrumental Use of Women in Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria." *An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies* 4.2 (2015): 78-96. <http://www.afrevjo.net/laligens>. Accessed on 29/10/2016.
- Pam, Gyang D. *The Christian and Pornography*. Jos: Chipat Graphics, 2011.
- Pedro, Sandra. "Communication Strategies for Preventing Violence against Women: A Case Study of Timor-Leste." Degree Research. Universidade Autonomo de Lisboa, Portugal, 2013. <http://www.ubi.pt/ec/14/pdf/EC14-2013Dec-01.pdf>. Accessed on 31/10/2016.



- Penner, Clifford and Penner, Joyce. *A Gift for All Ages: A Family Handbook on Sexuality*. Waco: Word, Inc., 1986.
- Sarup, Kamala. "Violence against Women and Role of Media." *Scoop Independent News*. New Zealand. Thursday, 13 January 2005. <http://www.scoop.co.nz>. Accessed on 29/10/2016.
- "Sexual Violence." *World Health Organization*. <http://www.who.int/violence-injury.../violence/.../en/chap6.pdf>.
- "Sexual violence: Why the Rise?" *News and Press Release*. 9 Jun. 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/sexual-violence-why-rise>
- "The Scariest of Sexual Violence Cases in Nigeria." *Daily Trust*. 22 Aug. 2020. <https://dailytrust.com/the-scariest-rise-of-sexual-violence-cases-in-nigeria>
- Ugbodaga, Kazeem. "11,200 Rape Cases Reported in Nigeria- Amnesty International." *PM News*. 19 November, 2021. <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2021/11/19/11200-cases-report-in-nigeria-amnesty-international>
- "Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women." *World Health Organization*. http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/.../WHO_RHR_12.37_eng.pdf. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- "What is Sexual Violence?" *National Sexual Violence Research Center*. <http://www.nsvrc.org>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- Women and Justice*. Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2002.
- Yuan, Nicole P., Koss, Mary P. and Stone, Mirto. "The Psychological Consequences of Sexual Trauma." *National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women*. <http://www.vwnet.org>. Accessed on 29/9/2016.
- Zovoe, Jonathan. "Rate of Sexual Assault Cases, Frightening." *Punch Newspaper*. June 4, 2016. [Http://punch.com](http://punch.com). Accessed on 30/10/2016.