

NIGERIAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

Vol. 7, No. 1, 2016

ISSN: 1596 - 6151



**A PUBLICATION OF THE NIGERIAN
SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

Published by Nigerian Sociological Society (NSS)

© May 2016

Nigerian Sociological Review Vol. 7, No. 1 (2016)
ISSN 1596 - 6151

Published: May 2016

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Printed by Grace Communications International
08065514126

Nigerian Sociological Review Vol. 7, No. 1, 2016

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Table of Content

Articles	Pages
1. The Nigerian Economy and Neo-Liberal Development Paralysis by Sofiri Joab-Peterside Ph.D.	1
2. Education Towards Promoting Local Content and Productivity During Economic Recession: A Psychological Study of Contemporary Situation in Nigeria by Ogbebor Godwin Gideon, Ph.D.	18
3. Deviant Political Behaviour and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria by Destiny Eze Agwanwo & Martins Igwe	25
4. The Social Implications of Drug Abuse Among Undergraduate Students in Delta State by May O. Esiri, Ph.D.	37
5. Media, Youth and Social Values in the 21 st Century: The Nigerian Situation by Ben U. Nwanne, Ph.D.	48
6. The Effects of Social Media Addiction on the Academic Performance of Delta State University Students by Lucky Ogheneruemu Ojoboh Ph.D.	58
7. Neighbourhood Satisfaction and Correlation with Cognitive Function of Older Adults in Two Nigerian Urban Settings by Eucharika O. Ejechi	77
8. Globalization and the Social Sciences by V.T. Jike, Ph.D. & May O. Esiri	87
9. Driving Endogenous Development through the Utilization of Local Resources in Nigeria by Bojoghre Nelson Ph.D.	92
10. Private Security and Security Provisions for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria by Destiny Eze Agwanwo & Martins Igwe	99
11. Sexual Harassment/Rape of Elderly Women by the Young Men in Enugu State, South East Nigeria by Sunday Evaristus Abonyi & Chukwujekwu Charles Onwuka	110
12. The Dynamics of Conflict and Food Insecurity in Nigeria: A Critical Nexus by Ogege Sam Omadjohwoefe Ph.D.	118
13. Women and Politics in Nigeria by Heoma Nsirim-Worlu Ph.D.	130

SEXUAL HARASSMENT/RAPE OF ELDERLY WOMEN BY THE YOUNG MEN IN ENUGU STATE, SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

The study examined sexual harassment and rape of the elderly women by the young men in Enugu State. A total of 480 respondents (240 for males between the ages of 18 – 35 years and females between 50 and above) were sampled using questionnaire, oral interview and focus group discussion as instruments. Results of the study show that most of the male respondents (193 or 80%) see the act as done only to satisfy the sexual desire of the young men while the female respondents link it to such factors as ritual practices for money making (97 or 40%), display of male dominance (51 or 21%) and mix up or disorganization custom/value system and evil forces (8 or 3%). In addition, majority of the female respondents 150 or 62.5%) confirmed that sexual harassment of the elderly women have been a daily occurrence in the state, although 55.4% of male respondents declined comment. Study findings also revealed that HIV/AIDs, STD/STI, depression and even death are the likely health hazards associated with this social evil. As a result, efforts should be geared towards addressing the key indices that promote sexual harassment of our ageing mothers by the young men through employment or job creation, strengthening the legal system and attracting stiffer penalties, attitudinal change in order to protect the sanctity of elderly women in Nigeria.

Key words: Sexual harassment, rape, elderly women, young men.

Introduction

In almost all parts of the world, women are generally regarded as the backbone of the family and the community in general. In a nutshell, no nation can function properly or experience meaningful progress without vital contributions from its womenfolk. This implies that Nigerian women are very industrious and capable of attaining or exceeding the same heights as their male counterparts. According to Nigeria's former president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo,

the role of women in societies from time past has never been in doubt. He remarked that the role of women in safeguarding our nation begins at the very core of their make-up as women with the special attributes that nature has bestowed on them. It is not only when they tend to us from the important stage of conception and reproduction.

Nwachukwu (2014) however noted that over the years, Nigerian men have continued to device ways and means of subjugating and turning Nigerian women especially the elderly ones into mere objects of satisfying their sexual desires in the form of rape and other forms of sexual harassment. Ibukun (2013) observed that there is now an automatic tendency to problematise Nigeria young men as a factor in the sexual victimization of the elderly women. As a result of this unwelcome development, the former Nigerian First lady, Dame Patience Jonathan while attending the advocacy meeting on sexual violence against women in Paris, France on December 6, 2013, called for strict penalties against rape and other perpetrators of sexual harassment against women.

Sexual access to women is generally regulated by institutional arrangements without the use of physical force. As Gluck and Koss (1997) noted sexual harassment or rape profoundly causes a deterioration in the interpersonal relationships and self esteem or competence of the victim. Menkiti (2013) also noted that rape or sexual harassment in any form especially those involving the older adult women may have severe physical, psychological and reproductive rights consequences on the victim which includes shock, depression, hatred, sexually transmitted infection/HIV/AIDs and even death.

It is likely that unemployment and poor educational attainment contributes much in promoting this ugly trend in most parts of Nigeria and other developing countries. However, some individuals tend to link this ugly saga to occultic purposes mainly for money making while others see it as an act intended only to satisfy the sexual urge of the perpetrators. According to Nollywood star, Dorothy Njemanze, the incidence of sexual harassment and rape in Nigeria generally seems to have been buoyed by a mix of Nigeria's value system, judicial system and beliefs. The artist argued that the judicial system in Nigeria is skewed in favour offenders and lack the ability to serve justice on the part of the victims. Similarly, Olaosebikan (2013) observed that the current spate of rape and sexual molestations of Nigerian women of all categories could be attributed to the misogyny, the patriarchal system and the objectification of women.

However, it appears that a high number of rape cases and other forms of sexual harassment are not reported officially. According to Menkiti (2013), this is because before the victim can get justice, a witness must corroborate her story even when it is clear that in most cases of rape, there are no witnesses to corroborate the story of the victim. In some cases, the victims and their families seem to be afraid of stigmatization and then prefer not to lodge any formal complaint. Similarly, Nwachukwu (2014) stated that sometimes, the police and the legal system automatically side with families of higher social status whenever their sons are accused of raping such women of humble and poor backgrounds. The author remarked that this has caused many rape victims to lick their wounds in silence and solemn misery rather than come out to tell their stories.

Moreso, many of the victims of this scandal do not undergo medical tests immediately after the act to ascertain full penetration and for swabs of the penetrators semen to be taken for DNA test. This further strengthens the case of the individual molesters against the

molested. This makes it imperative for government in most developing countries like Nigeria to begin to check the menace of sexual harassment of elderly women by young boys.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to examine the major reasons for the prevalence of sexual harassment or rape of elderly women by young men with such dire consequences, in order to plan effectively for the uprooting of this social evil.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are the major reasons underlying sexual harassment or rape of elderly women by young men in Enugu State?
2. What is the rate of occurrence of sexual harassment or rape of elderly women by young men in Nigeria?
3. What are the likely health hazards associated with rape and sexual harassment of elderly women by young men?

Literature Review

Sexual harassment or rape incidents of elderly women by young men is not peculiar to Nigeria and other developing countries but a global issue. According to Olaosebikan (2013), this scourge has become so pervasive that hardly can any week elapse without some horrendous tales about it from every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Michael (2014) reported that on March, 2014, a 30 year old young man was sentenced to 53 months jail term for raping an 89 year old woman at Hermantown, Minnesota, USA. It was also reported that within the same period, a young man of 28 years was charged to court in Mexico for attempting to rape a 76 year elderly woman while walking on a track at Alamosa elementary school early thanksgiving morning.

In Nigeria, Folarin (2013) reported that in September 2013, a 23 year old young man was said to have forcefully raped an aged woman of 50 years in her residence at Orile area of Lagos. Similarly in Gombe State, a reporter of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) revealed that a 22 year old young man was arrested by men of Nigeria security and civil defence corps for attempting to rape an 80 year old blind woman. In Ise Local Government Council of Ekiti State, a 25 year young man was also reported to have been arrested by the police in November 2013 for forcibly having carnal knowledge of 75 year old women. Njoku (2013) also reported that in July 2012, a set of boys within the ages of 18 – 25 years in Opi, Nsukka in Enugu State were apprehended and detained by the Armed Robbery Squad of the Enugu State Police Command on the allegation of rape of old women of 50 years and above mostly widows. This incidence was reported to have become a daily occurrence to the extent that women of the community had to flee their homes in the night to sleep with neighbours and friends. Njoku (2013) also reported in a different incident in Opi, Nsukka where a 19 year old boy was arrested by the police while attempting to have a carnal knowledge of a 65 year old woman admitted that he engaged in the notorious activity in order to derive pleasure and satisfy his sexual urge, stressing that it was not for money making as being popularly speculated. It was also revealed by the offender that as a part of their modus operandi, they usually lay siege against their victims along the road with sharp kitchen knives used to threaten the victim so that she would succumb to the sexual assault. This implies that these young men use to arm themselves with matchets and

other dangerous objects as they search and swap on their victims and forcibly make love with them. Moreover, some of the women sometimes sustain injuries of various degrees of wounds while attempting to flee from their predators. Apart from these, the young men also take advantage of the old women's fragile nature to overpower them and then have carnal knowledge of them.

However, irrespective of this, most rape and sexually harassed victims do not seek redress. According to Ogunbayo (2011), their reticence often arises from the uncooperative attitudes displayed by the police authority and the stigmatization which those who report the incident may face. In other words, the chances of conviction are dicey because the prosecution must prove beyond reasonable doubt that such incident occurred. Most offenders plead that what actually happened was consensual sex and because there is no witness, it becomes difficult to obtain justice. Research evidence has shown that most men who are involved in rape or sexual harassment are simply uncivil, they know it is difficult to prove and that most victims will even receive more embarrassment when they report the offender (Malamuth, 1981, Macormack, 1987, Ogunbayo, 2011). Moreover, most men believe that it is impossible to rape a woman. This line of thinking is that a woman who truly is unwilling to have sex knows what to do to hurt her attacking partner to stop him from having his way.

In order to stem down this ugly trend, Nuhu (2013) revealed that in 2013, the Nigerian law reform commission accepted to review all laws relating to sexual harassment and rape with a view to re-examining the laws and determining their relevance to the present day society. It is the wish of many Nigerians that the review is done as quickly as possible. Olaosebikan (2013) also suggested that offenders should be severely punished and rigid insistence on evidence by law enforcers should be dropped while stricter laws should be put in place to discourage offenders especially in Nigeria. Njoku (2013) equally revealed that Umuada Igbo International led by Mrs. Kate Ezeofor had in 2012 organized a protest march in Opi, Nsukka Enugu State for reported incidents of sexual harassment of aged women in the community. According to the author, the group unequivocally stated that unless the trend was stopped, it was capable of attracting God's wrath on the perpetrators. The author also reported that the protest march attracted the attention of members of the Enugu State House of Assembly who later set up a committee of inquiry that recommended among other things that the establishment of police station in most communities where the incidence was becoming rampant, strengthening the vigilante groups as well as encouraging the youths to be in the school as a way of ending the problem.

Methodology

The study focused on the factors that tend to compel young men to rape or sexually harass aged women, its prevalence and the attendant health hazards. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design which according to Eboh (2009) involves the collection of information on certain variables in a study population at one point in time. Enugu State was chosen as the study area with its seventeen local government council stratified into three senatorial zones; Enugu North, Enugu East and Enugu West Senatorial Zones. Since this study focused on young men between the ages of 18 – 35 years and aged women between 50 years and above, it was decided that a random sample of 40 respondents of each category from two local government area in each of the senatorial zones of the state be drawn using simple

balloting making a total of 480 respondents in all, comprising of literate and non-literate, employed or unemployed and dwelling in both rural and urban areas of the state. The study therefore adopted the multi-stage sampling technique.

The major instrument used for this study was structured questionnaire prepared in two sets (one for the elderly women and the other for young men) and scheduled oral interview questions. The questions were developed through extensive review of literature and based on the objectives of the study. The questionnaire consisted of two parts only; the demographic variables and substantive issues of the study. Focus group discussion was also employed to support the questionnaire items and the oral interview.

Results and Discussion

The study consisted of 480 respondents, (240 respondents in each category) made up of young men of between 18 – 35 years and elderly women of 50 years and above. A greater percentage of the respondents, both male and female were Christians, that is 231 (96%) for males and 439 (91%) for females respectively. The marital status of the respondents showed that 229 (95%) of the males were single only 5 respondents or 2.1% were married while 218 (90.8%) of the females were said to be widowed, 15 (5.1%) were said to be separated and 7 (3.1%) divorced. The level of education also indicated that majority of the males, that is 112 (46.7%) had primary education, 198 (40.8) secondary and 30 (12.5%) no formal education while a greater percentage of the females (51%) had no formal education, 98 (41%) primary and 19 (8%) secondary. Respondents occupation also showed that majority of males (208 or 87%) were applicants while 128 (58%) of the females were self employed or engaged in trading/business activities, 71 (30%) made up of artisans, 23 (9.6%) retirees respectively (Table 1).

On the reasons underlying sexual harassment of these elderly women by the young men, 193 (80%) of the male respondents indicated that it was done only for satisfying sexual desire of the young men, 33 (14%) said there was no reason while 14 (6%) mentioned satanic forces and mix up or disorganization in customs/value system. On the other hand, a greater percentage of the females (97 or 40%) attributed it to ritual purposes meant for money making, 51 (21%) linked it to gender inequality which compels the males to display their dominance over the females, 22 (9.2%) tried to see the situation resulting from unemployment or lack of job, 38 (16%) said it as a product of poor educational background while 8(3%) opined that it was mix up or disorganization customs/value system and satanic forces (Table 2). These findings were consistent with the views of Olaosebikan (2013) and Nollywood star, Dorothy Njamanze in the literature.

On the frequency or rate of occurrence, majority of the males (55.4%) indicated no opinion while 37% said it was not very often. Majority of the female respondents 150 (62.5%) on the contrary said it was quite often, 52(11.92) while 52 (21.9%) had no opinion (Table 3).

Finally on the health hazards associated with sexual harassment of the elderly women, majority of the male respondents 90 (38%) said 'none' while a greater percentage of the female respondents (102 or 42.5% and 96 or 40%) saw HIV/AIDs and STD/STI as the major health implications while 36 (15%) mentioned death. These corroborate with the views of Gutek and Koss (1997) (see Table 4).

Table 1: Socio-Demographic characteristic of respondents

Age (years)	Male	Female	Total
20 – 23	80 (33%)	0 (0)	80 (16.7%)
24 – 29	108 (45%)	0 (0)	108 (22%)
30 – 35	50 (21%)	0 (0)	50 (10%)
36 – 41	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
42 – 47	0 (0)	2 (0.8)	2 (0.4%)
48 – 53	0 (0)	61 (25%)	61 (12.6%)
54 – 59	0 (0)	75 (31%)	75 (15.6%)
> 60	0 (0)	99 (41%)	99 (20.6%)
Missing	2 (1%)	3 (1.3%)	5 (1%)
Total	240 (100%)	240 (100%)	480 (100%)
Religion			
Christianity	231 (96%)	208 (86.7%)	439 (91%)
Islam	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Africa traditional religion (ART)	5 (2.1%)	30 (12.5%)	35 (7.3%)
Missing	4 (1.6%)	2 (0.8%)	6 (1.3%)
Total	240 (100%)	240 (100%)	480 (100%)
Marital status			
Married	5 (2.1%)	0 (0)	5 (1%)
Single	229 (95%)	0 (0)	229 (47.7%)
Widowed	0 (0)	218 (90.8%)	218 (45%)
Divorced	0 (0)	7 (3.1%)	7 (1.5%)
Separated	0 (0)	15 (6.1%)	15 (3%)
Missing	6 (2.5%)	0 (0)	6 (1.3%)
Total	240 (100%)	240 (100%)	480 (100%)
Level of education			
No formal education	30 (12.5%)	123 (51%)	153 (32%)
Primary	112 (46.7%)	98 (41%)	210 (44%)
Secondary	98 (40.8%)	19 (8%)	117 (24%)
Tertiary	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Table 2: Frequency distribution of the reasons underlying sexual harassment of the elderly women

Reason	Male	Female	Total
Display of male dominance	0 (0)	51 (21%)	51 (11%)
Unemployment/lack of job	0 (0)	22 (9.22%)	22 (4.6%)
Rituals/money making	0 (0)	97 (40%)	97 (20%)
Poor educational background	0 (0)	38 (16%)	38 (8%)
Satisfaction of sexual desire	193 (80%)	2 (0.8%)	195 (41%)
None	33 (14%)	22 (9%)	55 (11.5%)
Mix up in custom/value system and evil forces	14 (6%)	8 (3%)	22 (9%)
Total	240 (100%)	240 (100%)	480 (100%)

Table 3: Frequency distribution of the prevalence of sexual harassment/rape of elderly women

Prevalence	Male	Female	Total
Very often	6 (2.5%)	11 (4.6%)	17 (3.5%)
Often	12 (5%)	150 (62.5%)	162 (33.8%)
Not very often	89 (37%)	27 (11%)	116 (24%)
No opinion	133 (55.4%)	52 (21.9%)	185 (38.7%)
Total	240 (100%)	240 (100%)	480 (100%)

Table 4: Frequency distribution of the health hazards associated with sexual harassment/rape of elderly women

Health hazards	Male	Female	Total
Death	70 (29%)	36 (15%)	106 (22%)
HIV/AIDs	24 (10%)	102 (42.5%)	126 (26%)
STD/STI	33 (13.8%)	96 (40%)	129 (27%)
None	90 (38%)	0 (0)	90 (19%)
Depression	23 (9.2%)	6 (2.5%)	29 (6%)
Total	240 (100%)	240 (100%)	480 (100%)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sexual harassment or rape of the elderly women and women who are past the age of menopause is one of the heinous crimes committed by young men in all societies. It is a degradation or humiliation of our ageing mothers who act as custodian of knowledge and feminine symbols of authority. The perpetrators of this social scandal who are mainly young men that are psychologically troubled is a pointer that Nigeria is undeniably sitting on a time bomb. It is therefore necessary that all hands should be on deck to arrest this situation. There is the need for serious sensitization, public enlightenment and counseling in all nooks and crannies of our society by experts in the behavioural sciences. More job opportunities should also be created for the youths and the legal system should be strengthened.

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