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SEXUAL ASSAULT IN NIGERIA AND THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH

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Abstract

Sexual assault is a worrisome phenomenon which has proven to be problematic in the contemporary Nigerian society. Sexual assault occurs due to so many underling issues which underpins the development and advancement of a country. That Nigeria is a developing country and there is a need for security and protection of lives at all levels cannot be over-emphasized. The issue of rape and other sexual violence seems to be thriving and is deepening its roots into the Nigerian society. There is a call for the interventions of human rights organizations, governmental bodies, and religious organizations in curbing this menace. The negative impact of sexual assault is numerous and as such, this criminal act continues to multiply itself amidst other societal problems. This paper will be employing the descriptive, historical and the conceptual method of research. The paper submits that there is an aged longed problem with the issue of sexual assault and also that, this sexual assault can be prevented. This paper will suggest various elements to curb this menace as a means of responding to the menace in Nigeria.

Keywords: Sexual Assault, Rape, Prevention, Nigeria

Introduction

Sexual assault is a coerced sex that often result in the sexual gratification on the part of the perpetrator, although what underpins the mind of the perpetration is an expression of power and dominance over the victim. Sexual assault undoubtedly is a problematic issue which has increased on a yearly basis. For a country like Nigeria, it has become a norm and tradition for sexual assault cases to be reported on a daily basis. A study by National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in 2016 shows that sexual assault is common in 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men experienced sexual assault involving physical contact during their lifetime. Nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 38 men have experienced completed or attempted rape and 1 in 14 men were made to penetrate someone (completed or attempted during their lifetime)[1].

The issue of rape cannot be undermined because it is an immoral, dishonorable, and sinful act against man and as such must be outrightly condemned by all. The case of Barakat Bello, an 18yr old girl who was raped and murdered at her father's premises in Ibadan came as a shock to the entire country. Many of such cases are still lingering as no solutions has been proffered. Rape remains a controversial issue with a few victims who come out to report their experiences. All these are due to the societal perception, prolonged cases as well as the psychological and physical consequences that comes with the experience.

In Nigeria, there are limited research on rape, unlike other developing countries. The reawakening is just beginning and a continual of this enlightenment would strengthen the victims and the entire masses. The

issue of sexual assault needed not to be overlooked as preventive measures should be placed on ground for the younger generations to follow.

In this paper, we will discuss the surge in incidence of rape in some Nigerian states, as well as reasons for the increased cases of rape, preventive measures, and finally the churches' response to the issue of rape in Nigeria. This paper would also proffer solution to this aged-longed phenomenon.

It is evident that the Christians are being admonished to do away with any form of sexual immorality as this could deter them from inheriting the kingdom of God. To the Christians, an act of abortion is an act of murder and murder is a sin unto God (Exo 20:13), and as such, a girl child who got raped and got pregnant has no right to an abortion.

If a virginity is what makes a woman honorable, rape is an easy weapon to permanently damage them.[2] This means that a lady who has disciplined and preserved herself could suddenly lose that prestige as a result of rape. In the Christian faith, 'the body of a human being is the temple of God' and as such, immorality shouldn't reside in it.

From the above paragraph, it is evident that defiling the body of another person is a sin before God. Rape could usher in demoralization, depression, and backsliding from the Christian faith.[3] To this end, it is evident that an act of sexual immorality/assault committed toward a Christian could deter the person from continuous fellowship. Conclusively, the above statements are to uphold the Christian faith, it serves as preventive measures for any Christian to enable them to model their Christian life.

Sexual Assault and Rape Conceptualized

The phenomenon of sexual assault has been an aged longed problem. Sexual violence occurs throughout the world although the measures put in place to curb this menace might differ from one country to another. Sexual assaults have a negative impact on the physical and mental health of the victims. Aside from the physical injury incurred, there are also some underlining challenges such as sexual and reproductive health hazards with both immediate and long-term consequences. The issue of sexual assault is not only limited to the women folk, but also a phenomenon that ravages both the male and the female gender. Sexual assault is also not discriminatory to sex, both male and females are affected but studies have shown that the number of female sexual assault victims (and assault perpetrated by males) is far greater than male victim.[4]

Sexual assault is when a person is forced, coerced, or tricked into having sexual involvements. Sexual assault is a form of sexual violence which covers a wide range of unwanted sexual behaviors. Sexual assault can be said to be any unwanted sexual behavior that makes a person feel uncomfortable, threatened, or scared. Sexual assault can also be said to be a form of trauma which often leads to shock, denial, silence, anxiety, fear, depression, low self-esteem, guilt, blame, isolation, flash backs, nightmares, mood traumatic stress disorder among others. Sexual assault includes rape which involves the forceful attempt to penetrate the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or even an object. Sexual assault can include other forms of assault involving a sexual organ, including contact between the mouth and penis or the vulva or anus.

There are various forms of sexual assault which includes rape within marriages or dating relationships, sexual abuse of children, rape by strangers, forced abortions, forced marriage or cohabitation, including the

marriage of children, denial of the right to use contraception or to adopt other measures to protect against sexually transmitted diseases, sexual abuse of mentally or physically disable people, rape during armed conflict, unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment, including demanding sex in return for favors, forced prostitution and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital mutilation and obligatory inspections for virginity among others.

Rape is defined medically as an unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent.[5] The issue of rape is a fundamental issue that pervades the human society. Various people have had to commit suicide as a result of rape. Also, rape is the crime of forcing somebody to have sex with one especially using violence.[6]

According to Ayonrinde, rape could even happen without the use of force.[7] Thus, an adult could manipulate and seduce a tender child, by either giving gift items or money in other to seduce a tender child, by either giving out gift items or money in other to seduce and have sexual intercourse with the child. The issue of rape is very common among Nigerians, and there are several reasons why people commit sexual assault.

People have different justifications as to why they rape, whether rape is psychological or behavioral, it is still a lingering question. Rape also involves any unlawful behavior or actions such as making a child touch, caress or suck one's private parts or genital organs to derive sexual pleasure.[8] The issue of rape is prevalent in our society and the vulnerable ones are usually women and children.[9]

There are various forms of rape which includes:

1. Date Rape: This can be described as a situation where two individuals have a social engagement with one another. The perpetrator would be one of the two parties.
2. Gang Rape: This kind of rape is done by many people, two or more individuals assaulting one person.
3. Power Rape: this type of rape is usually intended to sexually capture and unarm their victims.
4. Sadistic Rape: This kind of rape is performed by a psychopath, someone who is obsessed who can get the assault done whether by killing or torturing the victim.
5. Anger or Retaliatory Rape: It often involves the perpetrator wanting to express him/her anger on the victim.

The cases of children molestation are an issue that grows on a daily basis, children trafficking, and orphanage homes has continued to increase the numbers of victims for child's molestations. Apart from robbery attacks and relationship rapes (marriage and dating), underage children are often exposed to this menace. From all indications, rape can be identified as one of the problems in Nigeria and it saddens the heart that the rate of this crime increases daily.

Surge in Incidence of Rape in some states in Nigeria

As earlier discussed, the issue of rape is a global problem which are recorded in every part of the country. these cases are higher in some states, than they are in another. In Kano, a corps member was gang raped by four men in a classroom at noon.[10] In Lagos, on February 22nd, 2022, a father raped his 12years old

daughter.[11] Equally a man is allegedly reported to have been raped to death in the early hours of Tuesday, July 2012 by his six wives in Ogbadiho local government area of Benue State.[12]

Also, records have it that Omowumi Olajide, a 300level student at the University of Ilorin was raped and murdered at her Tanke residence around the University of Ilorin on June 2, 2021. Multiple individuals were arrested, and three persons were sentenced to death by hanging. Two other accused persons were sentenced to six years in prison while three were discharged and acquitted[13]. Rape cases are being reported all over the country, the preventive measures that would curb this menace is what the religious and the political leaders should look into.

The recent surge in rape cases in Nigeria alarmed the President Muhammadu Buhari so much that he pledged to tackle the plague through the instrumentality of the law. In his words, he said "I am particularly upset at recent incidents of rape, especially of very young girls. The police are pursuing these cases with a view to bringing perpetrators of these heinous crimes to swift justice". In a televised Democracy Day address to the nation on Friday June 12, 2020, he said, "I wish to assure all our women of this administration's determination to fight Gender Based Violence through the instrumentality of the law and awareness creations".[14]

The countless cases of rape and other gender -based sex crimes prompted stakeholders to analyse the situation in order to address the menace. Expressing his concern over the increasing cases of rape in Nigeria, the then Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mohammed Adamu attributed the upsurge to the lockdown imposed by government to curb the Covid-19 pandemic. Adamu told State House Correspondents after a meeting with president Buhari on Monday, June 15 that within five months, the police have recorded 717 sexual assaults incidents, arrested 799 rape suspects, 631 of the cases investigated and charged to court, while investigations are ongoing on 52 of the cases. Adamu noted that the rise is horrifying, adding that some people indulge in rape for ritual purposes, even as he assured that all those involved in the criminal act will be punished.

Many lives have been lost, many hopes have been shattered and many more lives would still be in a mess if the leaders are unwilling to find an appropriate solution for this age-longed phenomenon. Action Aid Nigeria reported that during the lockdown in March 2020, 253 cases of gender-based violence in Bauchi, Cross River, Enugu and Kebbi alone were reported which data only represents the number of reported cases; and does not, therefore include cases not reported.

Reasons for increase cases of Rape in Nigeria

Rape incidents are on the increasing side on a daily basis. There are different reasons as to why this cases are on the high side. One of this reason is the issue of poverty. The rate of poverty in Nigeria is alarming. Most families merely have enough to eat, and this in turn might lead the children into diving into illegal activities. Some adolescents associate themselves with hooligans who take advantage of their bodies. Some families even depend on the female children to hawk around the street at ungodly hours in other to make ends meet. There are several children who at a point in their lives been a victim of sexual assault because their families are not buoyant enough to take proper care of their needs.

Peer pressure is also another factor that cause increase in rape cases in Nigeria. Most adolescents are led into sexual promiscuity by peer influence.[15] Most adolescents want to be able to take charge of their lives and as such, negative choices would be made. There have been instances where friends have been said to

have lured their friends into getting raped by older men. The pressure they get from wanting to be in control of their lives is what pushes them down the lane of sexual assault. Nervous youths who keep rapists as friends may also learn negative behaviors from them and thus begin to act like one.

Another cause of increased sexual assault is the issue of indecent dressing. The African culture doesn't give room for immoral dressing. Women and ladies are always advised to dress and cover sensitive parts of their bodies in other not to entice the opposite sex. Indecent dressing in women and girls are inappropriate mode of dressing that often expose one's body that should be covered from public view.[16] The new fashion is indecent dressing. According to Eze, it has been fashionable, particularly among the youthful female folk to dress so half nakedly that some parts of their bodies that are supposed to be 'hidden' are exposed to the public. this might not be totally true because rape is a pre-conceived idea by the perpetrator. He might have been planning it before execution.

Civilization and modernity are another important cause of sexual assault. The influence of modernization has eaten deep into the society. Young folks are now being exposed to social media. The use of social media vices has increased the sexual drive of most youths. Pornographies, novels, magazines, and the likes have always stand as a means of enjoyment for the youths. All these and the sexually graphic music, movies, obscene literature directed at the adolescents arouse their interest in sex.[17] According to Gberindyer, some of them desire to experience it once, just to know how it is.[18] This makes it difficult for rape associated cases to reduce in the country.

The stigmatization associated with rape around the globe makes it hard for the victims to come out in the open. Usually, the victims are always keeping quiet until an external body forces them to come out. In as much as the silence is encouraged, perpetrators would be encouraged to go on in their criminal acts. Bold steps should always be encouraged, when legal charges are placed on these perpetrators, this would reduce the crime.

Mishandling of rape cases is another important reason rape cases is on the increasing side. It is an open secret that some policemen in Nigeria are fond of treating rape victims as though they are the offenders themselves.[19] The level of corruption in the country can make the prosecutors who are supposed to uphold the laws into taking bribes and turning the cases away.

Declination of moral values is also another issue that underpins the increase in sexual assault. As earlier said, the Africans have a value system to uphold and as such, these moral standards are always placed at high esteem. Also, the eroding social morality is resulting to some parents having passion for own biological children, pastor fancying their female converts and lecturers lusting after their students.[20] These moral values should be upheld in other to maintain peace, law, and order in the society.

Poor parent guidance is another cause of rape. Most parents often neglect their responsibility of taking care of their children. They rather allow these children to make certain decisions on their own. That some parents are rapists is the most alarming part of it all; we hear cases of fathers raping their biological daughters/sons or even granddaughters.

The place of rape in the Nigerian constitution is also another concrete reason for increased rape. The federal constitution of Nigeria doesn't really favor rape related cases. There are sections of the constitution which still gives room for injustice in the country. For instance, section 357 of the Criminal Code Act, CAP 77, LFN, 1990 opines that 'any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without the

consent or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of false threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm or by means of false or fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband is guilty of an offence called rape.[21] Also, section 282 of the penal code says that 'sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not rape, if she has attained puberty.[22] Apart from the constitutional provision, another issue to look into is the issue of the enforcement of these laws. According to Akinmadu, 'Enacting laws are not enough, what is more important is the enforcement of the law to protect those it is supposed to protect'.[23] It is therefore evident that there is little or no constitutional preference for rape victims.

Preventions

The issue of sexual assault like every other anomaly in the society could be prevented and amendable. The preventive measures would be highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs. Most of these measures are applicable within Nigeria.

Education

It is imperative that the introduction of educational system to the African soil is a means of enlightening the masses. It has been shown that the education of children especially the girl child goes a long way in boosting the socio-economic and socio-cultural status of women in the society.[24] However, this achievement will enlighten and empower the female folks who are often disadvantaged by the attention paid to the male child. Undoubtedly, there is an imbalance in the educational structures in the country. male children are usually given undue attention which the female folks are always at a detriment.

It is expedient that with the recent intervention of the government coupled with some interventions from other organizations, education is becoming mandatory. Sexual assault prevention requires a solid foundation and one of the pillars would be addressing the gross inequality against the girl child in the educational system.[25]

Institutional Framework

With the introduction of institutional framework like social services, criminal justice system, police and sexual assault services who are functional, skilled, and synchronized will go a long way in the prevention of sexual assault. These services need to be put on ground with strict interventions at every level in the community. Advising and encouraging the victims to break their silence and make use of this service will serve as deterrent to other criminals out there.

Recognizing Vulnerable Groups

It is expedient that any reasonable society will pay attention to the vulnerable ones. Disabled ones, orphans, runaways amidst others are usually vulnerable. Young adolescents also constitute another group deserving attention.[26] The high rates of sexual assault experienced by young people suggest there is an urgent need for preventive initiative which target young people population to be developed and to focus on adolescents using schools as prime sites of disseminating such prevention initiatives, with an increased emphasis on negotiating ethical and consensual relationships.[27] Recognizing this vulnerable groups and stretching out a helping hand will go a long way.

Public Enlightenments

Governmental organization and human right organizations should create enlightenments through newspapers, social media platforms, radios, conferences, rallies, school visitations, churches, mosques, clubs and so on. Furthermore, a coalition of organizations, including women's, religious bodies, businesses, and trade unions that are speaking out against all forms of sexual violence in a manner reminiscent of the "Take a Stand" movement in South Africa which commemorated an 'International Day Against Violence Against Women', could be replaced in every community with active support of the news media.[28]

Pre-assault Self-Defense

More pre assault self-defense courses should be encouraged for women at each governmental level. In some parts of the world women's self-defense courses, usually organized by institutional sexual assault prevention and response (SARP) program do in fact exist.[29] Awareness should be made concerning these courses and the female children should be encouraged to take on these courses.

Churches Response to Rape Cases in Nigeria

Christianity in Nigeria has for a long time often partook in the curbing of these menace. The Christians leaders have over the years spoken and preached against issues of rape and are known to usually admonish their members to live a sinless life. Churches have always been at the fore front to kick against the violation of human rights and injustice. According to Diara, they have the moral obligation to fight for women and girl children to live with dignity and well-being.[30] Christianity in Nigeria has also helped in preserving the societal values as well as modeling the culture, traditions, and way of life of the people.

To this end, it is obvious that churches in Nigeria have for a long time been involved in curbing the socio-moral menace in Nigeria. Christianity in keeping with its traditional role helps to proclaim the dignity of the human person. It preaches the gospel of the fundamental dignity of the person and equality of all human beings' rights and duties.[31]

An example is the Redeemed People's Mission (RPM), they're youth and teenager's departments where they nurture and educate their youths. The Christ Apostolic Church (C.A.C) also have various youth platforms which stand as an avenue for the youths to strive. These platforms are raised in other to empower the youth's ministry as well as bring them up in the spiritual morals and values.

Another example is the Anglican Church. Diara, maintains that the church has always been watching over the youths, who are more vulnerable and guiding them so as not to become easy prey to rapists. He postulates that the Anglican Church put out several measures against rape which are:

- Teaching the youths to be well behaved in the society. (Deut. 6:3-9)
- Training the youths to acquire skills that will better their lot in the society. (Prov 22:6)
- Providing for the youths. (2 Cor 12:14; 1 Tim 5:8)
- Nurturing the faith of the youths as they grow in the things of the lord. (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21)
- Controlling the behavior of the youths. (1 Tim 3: 12, 14)
- Disciplining the youths when they err (Prov 19:18)
- Loving the youths and showing it practically to them. (Titus 2:4)

He also added that the youth department of the church organizes;

> Seminars on success role, healthy role, business success, talent development, and other teaching that would bring to them notice, the danger of various evil and using instances to bring challenges to their lives. Again, when such programs are stayed, teachings on the menace of prostitution, smoking of various kinds and cultism that are the destroyers of the present-day youth.[32]

Conclusively, the church is known to be able to redeem and rehabilitate some which includes the rapists and the prostitutes. The church fulfills responsibilities of caring for both the spiritual as well as the social well-being of man in the society.[33]

Conclusion

Rape has been unraveled to be perpetrated by clergymen, lecturers, parents, friends, aunties, police officers, lawyers and so on and as such, it is very difficult for this menace to be curbed. People have many reasons for assaulting another individual. As earlier said, some are psychopaths, some are of the habits, and some gets triggered by what they see. Although, dressing is often times not the reason for rape because obviously, a 2yr old shouldn't be attractive to a 40yr old man.

Since time immemorial, the law has often disguise itself as a shield and protector while at the end of it all, it reveals itself to be a betrayer. To not give justice to the victims of this phenomenon is not humane. Humanity is standing for what is right in as much as it will be of benefit to everyone at large. After juxtaposing these various reasons, one should uphold what is right or what is wrong about this phenomenon.

Even though there are preventive measures, these measures can only reduce and deter offenders but not the total eradication. The church has tried in laying the foundation for moral values and this has helped in the rehabilitation of so many sexual assault perpetrators; but should not relent in such activities. Other churches that are yet to engage their youths in positivity should emulate those churches that have done so.

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