Contending with upsurge of rape cases

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In recent times, the Nigerian media has reported the increasing frequency of rape cases across the country. The upsurge, especially of gang rapes and rapes of girls by miscreants, relatives and neighbours, should rightly become a source of concern to all. Though a global phenomenon, appalling side to our experience of its menace here has to do with impunity of the perpetrators, lackluster response of justice administrators and absence of institutional supportive system to help the victims.  
  
Perhaps more worrisome is the fact that large numbers of suspected rapists roam freely on the streets after committing the heinous act. Equally bothersome is that the act has now assumed a new dimension whereby victims are sometimes gang raped in broad daylight with crowds hanging around as mute spectators of a salacious drama while victims are groped, stripped and assaulted. Another sad aspect is that victim is occasionally blamed while little is done concerning our apparently weak law.  
  
The rape epidemic in our society sadly reflects the extent to which women’s rights are threatened. This calls to question not only our sense of justice but our civilization. The big question, of course, is why do men rape? Most experts believe the primary cause of rape is an aggressive desire to dominate the victim rather than an attempt to achieve sexual fulfillment. They consider rape an act of violence rather than principally a sexual encounter. This is the opinion of experts. But one is of the opinion that beside the desire to dominate, rape, can also be situated in the state of minds of perpetrators.  
  
  
  
The brazenly manner rape is often committed indicates that perpetrators still have a stone-age mentality of women as chattels who are to be used without independent thoughts. It also portrays some as pure lunatics. Or what do we think of such recent reported case of a 14-year old, who was gang-raped to death by some miscreant in Lagos. The Junior Secondary School 3 student on holiday was said to be alone at home when the mad hoodlums fiercely gained entry into her parent’s apartment and took turn to rape her. The miscreants, according to report, usually hang out in a smoking joint in Abule-Ado area of Lagos State.  
  
Perhaps, more horrifying is the case of a 21-year old lady who was gang-raped by five men on her way to work early in the morning around 5:30 am at Irawo area of Owode-Onirin, Ikorodu, Lagos in May 2017. Most Nigerians would still not have forgotten an incident that occurred in 2011 when a woman, repeatedly asked her attackers to kill her as they take turns to rape her at a university dormitory at Abia State University. There was also the abominable case of a Dad who raped her 12-year-old daughter as reported in the Daily Sun of October 16, 2012.  
  
Cases of security men especially police officers re-raping rape victims have not lost in our memory either. In 2014, an Amnesty International report listed rape as one of the methods allegedly being used by the Nigerian Police to extract confession from female suspects. Again, most often, Police officers purportedly ask rape victims irrational and dispiriting questions. Sadly, the military is no better.  
  
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As if to prove a U.S. Novelist and feminist, Marilyn French right, over her submission that: “All men are rapists and that is all they are. They rape us with their eyes, their laws, and their code, voice against rape is still criminally silent, the law against rape is ineffective, the institutions to render support is sick and culpable of the act while our leaders seem helpless. We tend to reduce the problem to issue of indecent dressing as if the kids that beasts violated also attract them with indecent dress.  
  
  
  
Millions of Nigerians continue to believe that women invite trouble on themselves by being careless. Mothers often chide daughters for wearing provocative clothing, in most cases a sleeveless garment or a pair of hip-hugging jeans. Though one is against indecent dressing, but it could not be a justification for raping. Come to think of; is indecent dressing rapeable offence?  
  
In a nutshell, dramatic changes have to take place in public attitude towards rape if we are ready to stem the tide. Steps towards this direction include public enlightenment and education campaign as well as institutional support. Cheerfully, all these are being offered in Lagos State by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (WAPA) and Ministry of Justice through Office of Public Defenders (OPD) in Lagos State. WAPA has trained health workers drawn from primary and secondary health facilities in the state on Women’s Rights, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the management of GBV survivors. The health workers were trained to serve as change agents through which statistic on rape and other forms of violence can be gotten from. Documentation by health facilities can be useful as evidence to get a no contest order in criminal proceedings against perpetrators.  
  
  
  
The ministry also in conjunction with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) organised a symposium for HODs in WAPA and community leaders across the state on the need to end Gender Based Violence in the society. The ministry in addition collaborated with United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in organising Year 2016, 16 Days Activism against Gender “ Based Violence Campaign.  
  
This is an annual event that holds globally from 25th November, (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10th December, (Human Rights Day) to put an end to violence against women and girls around the world. The state has also courted the Lagos Police Command in this regard. Parley with police on gender violence has become a yearly activity in the state. Media and movie industries intervention in the fight against rape and other form of gender violence are also commendable.  
  
While one cannot say this has drastically impacted on the fight against rape, it is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. Therefore, one strongly recommends that other relevant stakeholders equally evolve new strategies that would really assist in tackling the menace of rape in our country. The heinous crime represents a slap on our collective sensibility and as such it must be frontally addressed.  
  
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