Living With Alarming Rape Cases In Nigeria

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THE Nigerian society is bedeviled by what appears to be increasing cases of rape. There are reported cases of rape in the media carried out in the homes of victims by those close to them such as relatives, friends and caregivers, in schools – primary, secondary and tertiary, and places of worship on a daily basis. Even young girls have been reportedly abused by their fathers.  
  
Rape is covered in the description of violence in The Beijing declaration and platform for action, which is any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women (and girls), including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.  
  
It is commonly found to be a form of sexual violence against women that occurs in Nigeria just like other parts of the globe. As a result, the issue has attracted the attention of not only human right activists, feminists from non-governmental organisations in Nigeria, but also from international non-governmental organisations.  
  
Noteworthy is that rape and sexual abuse are not limited to just the female alone, even though they constitute an overwhelming majority. Young boys are now also falling victims of rape.  
  
Yet, gender and human rights activists say that many of the cases go unreported. Unfortunately, most families prefer keeping rape and sexual abuse incidents involving their children or relatives to themselves, for various reasons associated with shame, stigma, character assassination, public backlash and limited access to justice, among others. The result is that these factors combined with rigours of legal procedures, make the victims unwilling to pursue their cases to logical conclusions, and the abusers go scot free, leading to more cases.  
  
Rape has many negative impacts on the victims.  
  
These range from psychological, emotional, and physical trauma on a survivor. The psychological impacts include self-blame and suicide. It could lead to gynaecological effects and pregnancy. While some have died as a result, studies on sexually abused boys have shown that one in five children that has been sexually abused is likely to abuse other children when he grows up.  
  
The law on rape in Nigeria is fairly straightforward. It is encapsulated in Section 357 of the Criminal Code Act, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, and stipulates that anyone who is convicted of using violence to have carnal knowledge of a woman without her consent shall be guilty of rape, and must be punished with life imprisonment.  
  
In remedying the situation, the Lagos State Government, for example, through the State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) approved the use of the 112 toll free emergency line to report cases of rape, domestic violence, defilement, child abuse, neglect and other sexual assaults perpetrated in the state. This is with a view to helping victims report cases of rape or domestic violence in the state and gain easy access to professionals that can help them, and treat them with maximum confidentiality.  
  
Despite these efforts, government’s prosecution of offenders may have not been encouraging, as it has been reported that sex offenders have been made to do community service, as a form of punishment contrary to the stipulated law.  
  
However, government’s intervention alone in the matter, experts on the subject say, is not enough to tackle the monstrous situation. It requires the agencies partnering with government, parents and other stakeholders on how society should treat rape offenders and discussions, what one has fallen a victim should immediately do and the things that should be done to bring succour to the victims.  
  
The situation places demands on parents, especially mothers, who on their part are to ensure that they are close to their children, such that the children can freely tell them their daily experiences, and the mothers in turn give the right information to them, and make vigilance their watchword.  
  
It is heart-warming though that people are beginning to come out of their shell to report that they have been raped as this now found voice will begin to question the temerity of the rapists.