Security professionals raise concern over surge in sexual violence

Date: 2020-07-06

Source: https://guardian.ng/news/security-professionals-raise-concern-over-surge-in-sexual-violence/

• Blame COVID-19 lockdown for spike  
  
• Urge govt to declare state of emergency  
  
Security and safety professionals have called on federal and state governments to address the prevalent rape cases by emplacing effective legislations and retributions against perpetrators of violence against women and children.  
  
  
  
Former Officer in the United States Air Force and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Bullwark Intelligence, Tanwa Ashiru, said that rape in Nigeria had become an ugly trend. According to him, victims of rape suffer because government has not been responsive to the menace.  
  
  
  
“One of the major ways to curb the trend is to institute stricter punitive measures for perpetrators. They must be held accountable. Doing this will send a strong message that Nigeria has zero tolerance for rape.  
  
  
  
“The majority of violent sexual offences are committed by acquaintances and relatives. Men are also victims of rape. Therefore, it is important that we begin to talk to our children about inappropriate physical contact and encourage them to report such if it ever occurs to them,” she said.  
  
  
  
She also disclosed that there are multiple strategies, which the government could implement to minimise rape. The first strategy, she explained, would be to ensure justice for victims, and this could be done through proper investigation and legal prosecution. She added that “government should increase access to designated healthcare centres, where appropriate legal evidence can be collected, and the right psychological care can be made available for victims. These can be located in areas where rape claims are mostly reported.”  
  
  
  
She, however, lamented that many women did report rape cases, “but were made to think of themselves as being guilty.” To curtail this, she suggested that the police should provide competent, trained personnel, including female officers, who would provide the proper response to women who come to report rape cases.”  
  
  
  
A security consultant and convener of the Association of Industrial Security Operators of Nigeria (AISON), Dr Ona Ekhomu, said the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in extensive lockdown of the country, sparked increase in sex crimes.  
  
  
  
“COVID-19 lockdown is merely the tipping point of a social problem that has been with us for a long time. However, because rapes are often under-reported, the extent of the rape epidemic in Nigeria was not well known,” he said. Ekhomu empasised the role of the social media in exposing perpetrators and reporting them. He described the media as the voice of the voiceless.  
  
  
  
“The renewed attention being paid to the rape crime is probably as a result of its exposure in social media. Citizen journalists are now telling the story, which had remained untold for a long time. In effect, social media appears to be giving voice to the voiceless.  
  
  
  
“The Uwaila Omozuwa case and Barakat Bello case appear to have hit a sympathetic nerve. The civil society organisations that have organised protests against the rape epidemic have also been effective in drawing attention to the problem,” Ekhomu explained. The security expert said that the collective conscience of Nigerians would be moved by the brutal rape and murder of Uwa and other victims to bring about change and curtail the prevalence of the heinous crime in Nigeria. According to him, while rape thrives on several factors in contemporary Nigeria, the growing rape epidemic is a result of ignorance.  
  
  
  
“Rape victims are not aware that, after the brutal violation, they are required to go to the hospital to provide physical evidence that will be admissible in court. Often, they take showers or wash up, thereby destroying crucial evidence.  
  
  
  
“Even when they go to the hospital for seizure of physical evidence, the health workers often mock them, suggesting that they asked to be raped. In many police divisions, rape victims are treated with disdain and mockery. This is adding insult to injury.  
  
  
  
“In other countries, rape cases are handled by Police Special Victims Units (SVUs) that are specially trained to deal with sexual offences. The Nigeria Police Force is a special case study of jack-of-all-trades and master of none. There is no specialisation in sexual offences, which are often heinous. So, many rape cases fail or are tainted at the police investigation stage.  
  
  
  
“Victims of rape are made to pay for stationery, fuel, tires, lunch and all that is required to conduct a rape investigation. An individual without substantial financial means cannot fund a rape investigation. Although civil society organizations sometimes provide assistance, many cases are never brought to their attention,” he said.  
  
Poor prosecution aggravates cases  
  
Ekhomu also blamed spike in rape cases to lack of diligent prosecution of offenders, saying, “Even when cases are reported and investigated, the prosecution is often feeble and faulty.” He said the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) had been slowly changing the narrative, as it secured over 90 convictions in 2019 for various sexual offences.  
  
  
  
“The fact is that, our police and DPPs don’t have a passion for rape cases except it concerns someone they know,” he lamented. Also, a former chief of the Department of State Services (DSS), Mr David Amachree, who is also the CEO of Zoomlens Security, said that sexual assault and killing were not new in Nigeria, but the lockdown aggravated a situation where active men became bored and those who could not control their libido started taking it out on any female around.  
  
  
  
“With the whore-houses closed, coupled with empty pockets, they have decided to take advantage of the vulnerable. The killings are more to conceal the identities of the perpetrators.”  
  
Publisher of Chief Detectives Magazine, Dipo Kehinde, said the government must declare an emergency and launch massive enlightenment for women.  
  
He advised, “Girls should learn to move in groups, especially when going to a lonely place to read. Girls should at all times listen to their intuition when alone. They should avoid dangerous or isolated places and be aware of their environments.”  
  
  
  
Itemising other measures, Kehinde recommended that “The police should engage on community patrols. Several years after its take off, we are yet to see the gains of community policing. The communities are not being policed.”  
  
He said girls should learn not to accept drinks from someone they’ have just met, “and if they are having a drink outside, it must be opened in their presence and they must not leave the drink for a moment. Girls must not post too much information about themselves on social media.  
  
  
  
“If the worst comes and you are attacked by a rapist, run if you can; otherwise scream and fight for your life. If he has already grabbed you, scratch his face and body violently, there’s a possibility of tracing him through forensic analysis of the bloodstain.  
  
  
  
“If it is in your house, run into the kitchen, grab a knife and fling plates at him as you’re screaming. If your attacker is armed, act friendly, try and flatter or talk to him in a humorous way as you plan your escape or attack that should be sudden.”  
  
  
  
Security analyst and Crime Editor of The Sun, Christopher Oji, urged religious leaders to stand up against rape. According to him, “rape has been in existence for a long time. In the Bible, Moses advocated outright stoning to death of a rapist. Rape is evil and anything evil is condemnable. In Western world, people tie rape to drugs, but in Africa, especially Nigeria, it is now becoming rampant and worrisome as it has now become an everyday crime. Almost every day, one person is raped or falls victim of attempted rape. The recent ones being that of Omo Osazuwa, a UNIBEN student and a polytechnic graduate in Ibadan, Rasikat.  
  
  
  
“The two cases went viral because they were murdered. There are many other victims who were abused the same period but did not make headlines because of their status in the society. During this pandemic lockdown, at least about 20 females and three boys were sexually and forcefully abused. Who are abusing them? Some are close relatives; fathers, brothers, hoodlums, superiors in offices, lecturers, medical doctors, etc.  
  
  
  
“The question is: why do people indulge in rape? Whether we believe it or not, many rapists do it for ritual purposes. Recently, a man was caught pants down at the Abule Egba area of Lagos raping a dirty and mentally challenged woman who was resisting him. He was about to be lynched, but was rescued by some soldiers who took him away. Before he was rescued, he allegedly confessed that he did it as commanded by his spiritualist (juju priest), who assured him that he would be swimming in millions afterwards.  
  
  
  
“Recently a senior police officer was accused of raping a boy, I4, through the anus. He claimed he did it for his long delayed and awaited promotion. Just three weeks ago, a senior man in a federal ministry was also arrested in Abuja after having sex through the anus with a 13-year-old boy. Also, a pastor at Mafoloku, Oshodi, was arrested by police operatives from Zone 2 Command, Onikan, Lagos, for abusing some of his female church members. Many housemaids are going through hell in the hands of their masters who rape them recklessly. How about female secretaries in offices who are abused by their bosses?  
  
  
  
He also advised that rape victims should not compromise when they are offered compensation by the rapists to stop a case against them, saying,  
  
“Women should be conscious of clothes they wear. Ladies should avoid lonely places and walking in dark places at night. They should avoid the company of strangers and learn to report sexual harassment to appropriate quarters, as the trauma of rape is worse than the rape itself.”