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Six-year-old Tina, was allegedly raped by her mother’s cousin, who came to the house for a visit, but they decided not to prosecute him because they felt it would expose and put the family to shame. In another case, three-year-old James was molested by his Sunday school teacher. She took the boy to the toilet to ease himself, but afterwards started fondling him, while also asking him to touch her intimately.  
  
The shameful deed came to light, when James got home and attempted to do to the mother and sister what his teacher made him do to her. After a series of questions, he informed his parents what transpired between him and the Sunday school teacher.  
  
These are just two of the increasing sexual abuse cases, which are reported daily in Nigeria. Unfortunately, most families prefer keeping rape and sexual abuse incidents involving their children or relatives to them selves, thereby letting abusers go scot free, which has resulted in more cases of rape by the abusers. Rape has become endemic in the society, as hardly does a week pass without an incident being mentioned in the media.  
  
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, which 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.  
  
Recently, the Lagos State Government, 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 to enable victims have easy access to professionals that can help them, as well as members of the public wishing to report rape cases or domestic violence in the state, which will be treated with utmost confidentiality.  
  
However, government’s prosecution of offenders may have not been encouraging, as it has been reported that a total of 3,083 sex offenders were made to engage in community service, as a form of punishment between January 2014 and February 2105, which is contrary to the stipulated law.  
  
According to the Executive Director Project Alert, Josephine Effah-Chukwuma, rape is a very serious crime, which cannot be punished by judicial slaps on the wrist and so; convicted offenders must be made to face the full weight of the law.  
  
Said she: “recognising that 70 per cent of reported rape cases in Nigeria today involve young people and children of ages 17 to zero, a lot of sensitisation programmes need to be carried out in communities, schools and faith based organisations. The primary goal of such programmes is to let people know how prevalent it is and what can be done to prevent it.  
  
“Different target audiences have different responsibilities towards curbing sexual abuse of children and teenagers. Parents, guardians and schools must watch out for unhindered access and opportunity. Sexual abuse of a child or a teenager cannot happen, if there is no access to him/her, as well as the opportunity to strike. Pedophiles strike, when both access and opportunity are present.”  
  
She also noted that in schools, teachers already have access to children by virtue of the fact that they teach them, but management must ensure that teachers don’t have the opportunity to sexually abuse a child in school. While at home, parents and guardians must watch out for those who have access to their children and who could attack them, if there is an opportunity. Parents should also be sensitive to those picking up and dropping their wards in school.  
  
“Young girls and children can also be sensitised on steps they could take to reduce the risk of being sexually abused. This can be done in an appropriate manner, depending on the child’s age. For instance, a little girl of between three and six years can be taught not to sit on a man’s lap. She could also be taught about the private and public parts of her body; that while clothes cover the private parts, the public parts such as the legs, hands and face are exposed.  
  
“Young girls in senior primary and junior secondary can be taught to avoid lonely roads; not walking on the road with earphones; not taking already opened drinks, as well as avoiding being alone with a man or boy, even if he is a friend or family member, since 95 percent of victims are raped by people they know, love and trust.”  
  
She said that part of what has increased sexual abuse of children in the society includes poor parenting skills. In her view, many parents are no longer paying adequate attention to their kids, believing that money is everything.  
  
“There is also the issue of unmonitored Internet usage, immoral parents and poor public awareness and knowledge of the issue to help prevent it. The poor/inappropriate response by society and the criminal justice system starting from the Police is also not helping matters.  
  
“The key thing is to prevent sexual abuse, but if it does happen, keeping silent and not reporting it will not solve it. It would rather further endanger the person, as she will be exposed to various health risks and the possibility of the attacker striking again,” she said.  
  
A psychologist and sex expert, Mathew Adedoyin said any child that has experienced sexual abuse is likely to abuse another child when he grows, as studies on sexually abused boys have shown that around one in five continue later in life to molest children themselves.  
  
Such experiences, he said, may lead to a pattern of behaviour, where the man regularly justifies being violent, denies doing wrong, and has false and unhealthy notions about sexuality. This kind of rape may or may not have been pre-planned.  
  
“A man my team arrested for raping a lady confessed of being abused severally as a child by their maid. This act with the maid re-programmed his mind, which made him feel that anytime he wanted sex and no one is around or he couldn’t afford a prostitute, he should go for little girls in the neighborhood. He confessed to having lost count of the number of girls between ages 12 and 24 that he had forcefully slept with.  
  
“Anyone who experienced physical and emotional abuse early in life is likely to be addicted to sex, thereby leading to rape, while others rape out of anger. This category of rapists’ aim is to humiliate, demoralise and hurt their victim. To them, sex is a weapon to defile and degrade the victim; rape constitutes the ultimate expression of their anger. This kind of rape has been pre-planned by the rapist.”  
  
Adedoyin also said that watching erotic movies and listening to erotic lyrics increases incidences of rape.  
  
“Some rapists rape just to satisfy sexual urge. They long for sexual fulfilment, but since they are too shy to approach a lady for a relationship, they feel that forceful coition is the best way to satisfy their urge. Alcohol has also been shown to play a role in certain types of sexual assault, as have some other drugs, notably cocaine. It has a psychopharmacological effect of reducing inhibitions, clouding judgments and impairing the ability to interpret cues. So, people are more likely to act violently when drunk because they do not consider that they will be held accountable for their behaviour.  
  
“Indecent dressing that shows boobs, thighs and bums are likely to be another reason for rape. Men have visual libido and are attracted to what they see. If a loose man sees the sensitive part of a woman, he won’t care about anything until he finds his way into her privates, either by consensual term or by coercion.  
  
“If every Nigerian knows what to do in the case of rape, we would have less rape incidence, less unwanted pregnancies and a decrease in the number of people with HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Rape victims need emotional support and must realise and be re-assured that the rape was not their fault.  
  
“Preserving the evidence is key, by not having a shower, washing the clothes and underwear, brushing your teeth, drinking anything, eating, washing hands, or urinating until after the victim have had a medical examination. When any of these is done, chances of destroying the evidence is high because the attacker may have left behind hairs, fibre, saliva or semen.  
  
“It is proper to save all of the clothing worn as at the time of the assault, placing each item of clothing in a separate paper bag (plastic bags are not advisable because the heat in them may destroy your evidence such as the semen). Cleaning the area where the assault occurred should be avoided. This can be quite difficult, as victims want to shower and feel refreshed, but it will help you get justice.  
  
“Getting medical examination is very important and must be done in a government hospital because only their reports are admissible in court. Victim must be given access to Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV infection and this should be taken within 48 hours. It is available at every government hospital.  
  
“Reporting to the police is crucial in the quest to get justice and keep the abuser behind bars. Every time we lock up a rapist, we’re preventing him or her from committing another attack. The victim should get professional counseling. It is the first step to recovery, as they are more likely to suffer depression, low self esteem, guilt, sleep disorders and insecurity among other negativities.”