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“Keep quiet; do what I want, you will be fine.”  
  
“Be a happy a man of God has disvirgined (sic) you.”  
  
These are the chilling words Busola Dakolo says she was told while recounting her rape at the hands of the Pastor Commonwealth of Zion (COZA) Biodun Fatoyinbo. Dakolo’s allegations have caused national outcry and #COZA has been trending on Twitter for over six hours. While there are several who are sympathetic, many more are determined that she’s crying wolf. Amongst the hashtags and tweets, the accusations vary from asking what she was wearing to demanding she bring photographic evidence but the most common ask why she has waited so long to speak out.  
  
Rape victims especially in high profile cases who speak out about their experiences years after the attack are often slandered by the public as opportunists making up these stories for attention or money or to get back at a man who rejected them. The logical questions being why wait for so long to speak out? Why wait till there’s no more evidence to expose your supposed attacker? It can seem premeditated, an attempt to wait till you can’t be disproved but rape isn’t just physical trauma, it’s psychological.  
  
Emotional trauma, especially one as damaging as sexual assault, often takes years to overcome and sometimes isn’t overcome at all. The reasons why rape victims don’t speak out are individualized and varied but these are the most common reasons:  
  
Shame  
  
Being unable to fend off an attacker or protect yourself from harm always carries an element of humiliation at what you perceive as your own powerlessness. This embarrassment at their own weakness often causes the victim to blame themselves for the actions of their perpetrator. Why didn’t I scream louder? Or run fast enough? Or fight back? Are common thoughts. The indignity and dehumanization of rape matched with a sense of self crippling shame can result in victims being unwilling to speak out, too humiliated with themselves to share the experience with anyone else, terrified they will be looked down upon.  
  
Depression and Low Self Esteem  
  
Sexual violations wound a woman’s self-esteem and sense of self. Some victims are emotionally crippled by rape. The shame they face makes them lose self-esteem. They lose respect for their bodies and integrity. They begin to deny or minimize their rape as no big deal or something they deserved and they lose the will to report the abuse-or to live. Studies suggest that sexual harassment can lead to suicidal behaviour. Up to 15 of 1,000 females studied reported saying they made suicidal attempts after suffering from some sort of sexual harassment. RAINN reports 94% of women who are raped experience PTSD symptoms. Nearly a third of victims still have those symptoms 9 months after the rape, and 13% of women who are raped attempt suicide.  
  
Rapists Can be Family Members  
  
Perpetrators can be people the victims care about. In 8 out of 10 rape cases, the perpetrators are known to the victims. They can be close friends, family members, or even parents. Victims can be reluctant to speak out either to preserve the relationship or out of fear of breaking the status quo. Victims can even feel love for their attackers and question speaking out for fear of hurting them.  
  
They Think They’re the Only One  
  
Most victims are convinced they’re the only victim of a sexual harasser or abuser. They often believe it’s only happened to them and no one else and become determined to move on seeing it as a minor obstacle. It is often only after other victims step forward to say that they were abused by a perpetrator that a victim may realize that they are dealing with a serial abuser or paedophile.  
  
Reliving Trauma  
  
Imagine being asked about the day someone you loved died, imagine having to recount in graphic detail how they passed, what it felt like, who you were with, what you were wearing. It’s harrowing to think about but this is often what rape victims go through when asked to describe their rape. Rape is emotionally scarring and speaking out can feel like opening old wounds.  
  
Threats  
  
Rape victims are often threatened by the perpetrators. Threats of violence against themselves or family members, ruining their careers or even repetition of the act can make victims reluctant to speak out.  
  
They Won’t Be Believed  
  
This is the biggest deterrent to victims of rape. In instances where rape victims speak up, they aren’t believed. Nigeria since its independence, has 18 cases of convicted rape despite having a sexual assault and rape statistic of 1 in 4, with approximately 70% of people reporting incidents of sexual violence. 24.8% of females’ ages 18 to 24 years experienced sexual abuse prior to age 18 of which 5.0% sought help, with only 3.5% receiving any services. With such dismal numbers, it’s hard for victims to speak out.  
  
The court processes of proving rape can be daunting. Victims are often asked questions blaming them for their own victimization such as what were you wearing, or they can be held to severe religious law such as bringing 4 male witnesses to their rape. In high profile cases, the public can retaliate by harassing and verbally abusing rape victims such as with Cherly Zondi, the accuser of South African Pastor Timothy Omotoso who received death threats. With the consequences of speaking out being so severe most victims stay silent.  
  
These collective factors partnered with the after-effects of rape, which include, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal impulses and depression, make it almost impossible to speak out. It can take years of therapy and healing to eventually have the confidence and courage to speak out against their perpetrators. Some never do. Wairfing reports 97% of rapists to go free. The brave few like Bukola Dakolo have decided to stand against the numbers and speak out.  
  
We can’t change the past, we can’t stop sexual attacks from taking place but we have it within our power to make the world a better, safer place for victims. We have it within our power to stop the public lynchings of rape accusers. We have it within our power to encourage friends and family to speak out if we know they’ve been raped. We have it within our power to demand the Nigerian government improve it’s sexual assault policies, to make rape kits accessible and to penalize rapists severely. We have it within our power, to aid victims suffering from guilt, shame and PTSD and change their lives simply by saying: I believe you.  
  
(Oluwaseun Ayodeji Osowobi, CEO of Women Deliver asks COZA Victims willing to speak out to DM her on her Twitter handle @ayodejiosowobi)