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Yes. Rape is a serious crime in Nigeria. It is a criminal offence and if found guilty, carries a life sentence.  
  
Laws that govern rape in Nigeria;  
  
The Criminal Code – applicable in all the Southern States  
  
The Penal Code – applicable in all the Northern States  
  
The Criminal Laws of Lagos – applicable only in Lagos State  
  
The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP Act)– this is a federal law that has only been domesticated in Lagos, Anambra, Ebonyi and Oyo State.  
  
Under the Criminal Code of Nigeria (Section 357 & 358), Rape is defined as “having unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or by means of false act, or, in case of a married woman, be personating her husband.” This offence is punishable by imprisonment for life, with or without caning.  
  
  
  
Under the Penal Code of Nigeria (Section 282), “A man is said to commit rape who has sexual intercourse with a woman in any of the following circumstance: against her will; without her consent; with her consent, when the consent is obtained by putting her in fear of death or of hurt.”  
  
Under the Criminal Laws of Lagos State (Section 258) “Any man who has unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman or girl without her consent, is guilty of the offence of rape”  
  
Under the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (Section 1) “A person commits the offence of rape if he or she intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person with any other part of his/her body or anything else without consent, or the consent is obtained by force”  
  
Rape and sexual assault are serious crimes against the dignity and sexual rights of an individual. Everyone has the right and free will to make informed decisions about their sexual conduct and also to respect these same rights and dignity of others. We also all have a collective responsibility to protect the rights , safety and wellbeing of all children at risk of rape and sexual assault. From the legislations outlined, consent is a predominant factor when it comes to offences of rape and sexual assault.  
  
The VAPP Act is also a little more expansive in its interpretation, as it makes provisions for both male and female sexual offenders. It also takes into consideration in another section the rape of a person by a group of people (commonly referred to as ‘gang rape’) which is the first of its kind in Nigerian laws.  
  
The prosecution and conviction of sexual offenders, in spite of the prevalence of rape and sexual violence in our society, and the laws that exist to govern rape are extremely low. It is also very difficult to find established data readily available from reliable sources. Unconfirmed reports of 18 reported convictions in Nigeria till date was seen in one publication.  
  
Certain prevailing attitudes exist in Nigeria that encourages survivors to hide in guilt and shame and perpetrators to continue with impunity may be a contributory factor in the under reporting and low conviction rates.  
  
In order for us to see an increase in the rate of prosecution and convictions of sexual offenders there needs to be an increase in advocacy and awareness. Our society operating on a patriarchal system and steeped in traditional norms and practices that encourage this abuse, needs to change; so we present an enabling environment for survivors to feel safe to speak their truth and report this crime, without fear of ‘victim blaming’ from community members and reprisals from the perpetrators or family members. Survivors also need to be aware of their rights as citizens and feel secure in the knowledge that justice will prevail and that the perpetrator will be punished for this crime.  
  
It is important to always remember that rape can happen to anyone but it is never the fault of the survivor, under any circumstances; it is ALWAYS the fault of the rapist. Rape is a deliberate and conscious decision.  
  
If you have been raped or you know someone who has, please visit us at The WARIF Centre –  
  
6, Turton Street, off Thorburn Avenue, Sabo, Yaba or call our  
  
24-hour confidential helpline on 08092100009