The rape pandemic

Date: 2020-06-22

Source: https://guardian.ng/opinion/the-rape-pandemic/

There is a rape pandemic ravaging the country. Media reports show that some men have gone crazy over illegal sex and have resorted to bestial actions with the other sex. Some prey on children. Some perpetrators are family. They prey on little girls, sometimes as young as three months. Daddies rape their daughters. For some daughters, it has become routine, having gone on for years. And the girl child involved becomes both as a victim and a partner of sorts because it continues into adulthood. There have also been shocking reports on social media about men raping and killing their victims, ostensibly to cover up the crime. A lady was killed in Ibadan because she refused to be raped! Groups have taken to the streets to protest the upsurge in rape cases. State governors have declared an emergency on rape matters. It is a serious matter now in a crisis mode. It deserves all the attention that the nation can give. Any father who has girls feels the fear of his dear daughter being violated someday by a pig of a man! It is not a good feeling!  
  
  
  
But there are some disturbing questions which we should answer now that the issue has caught national attention. Why the sudden upsurge in rape cases? Does it have any connection with the lockdown? Or has society simply become more aware and liberal as to report incidents which had always been hidden? Have we always reported rape cases? Have we done away with the stigma that comes with rape? How do families handle incestuous rapes? What has become of the idea of tabooed actions? How do rape victims deal with the often-traumatic experience?  
  
Rape has always been present in society. It comes in different forms. Any sexual activity between a man and a woman or between two persons without mutual consent is rape. Rape is a ‘type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without that person’s consent’. Modern definitions add the fact that it ‘may be carried out by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority, or against a person who is incapable of giving valid consent, such as one who is unconscious, incapacitated, has an intellectual disability or is below the legal age of consent’. There is also the unusual occurrence of a woman raping a man, often a minor, or a gang of women raping a man. Whatever it is, rape is a crime, a defined by the law.  
  
  
  
There is also the angle of rape in a husband-wife relationship. While stating that a wife who is forced into sex by her husband is a victim of rape, no wife in Africa is likely to show up in court to report that her husband forced himself on her. To be sure, even her own family would ‘feel disgraced’. Which is one of the issues on rape cases: what will the family say, how will the family feel if this report comes out in the open? A variant of this is would the lady involved find a spouse later in life if it is known that she had once been raped? Sadly, the name or reputation of the family is considered more important than the feeling of the victim. I do not speak about women who naturally enjoy being forced by their partner anytime they need to have sex. That is another matter completely.  
  
Wikipedia states that ‘Southern Africa, Oceania and North America report the highest numbers of rape’ and that ‘500,000 rapes are committed annually in South Africa, once called ‘the world’s rape capital’. Rape is also on the rise in India, often carried out with impunity owing to some cultural beliefs in some areas that see women as property and less than human beings. It is also reported that ‘7 out of 10 cases of sexual assault involved a perpetrator known to the victim’. There is also the angle of blaming the victim. Why did the lady dress in a provocative manner? Why did she visit the man in an odd hour? Why did she sleep over if she knew she was not ready to have sex? Let us start by saying that anyone who blames the victim is not aware of the psychology of forced sex. I subscribe to the view that no lady should dress provocatively and visit a man in a secluded place. But the man who forces a girl or a boy into having sex is an offender. As WARIF Centre puts it, ‘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’.  
  
One of the challenges of rape is the low level of prosecution despite the high number of media-reported cases. Some victims agree to ‘settle the matter’ with the active connivance or encouragement of law enforcers. Although the Penal Code of Nigeria (Section 282), the Criminal Laws of Lagos State (Section 258), and Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (Section 1) all present rape as serious offence, one unconfirmed report states that there have been only eighteen convictions in Nigeria! Most rape cases are never reported. Even some ladies find it difficult or impossible to tell their parents or guardians!  
  
  
  
Rapists should be prosecuted and convicted. Victims identities should be protected. Known rapists should be named and tagged. A special anti-rape unit should be created in the Nigeria Police dominated by trained women. There have been too many cases of policemen blaming the victim. There should be more advocacy programmes on the subject. The law should not be a respecter of persons. Some of the very powerful men in institutions – universities and polytechnics, banks, corporate organizations, churches, and mosques- believe that their position is security to inflict pains on the opposite sex. Fathers who violate their toddler daughters fit into this category. We need scapegoats. We also need active shelters for ladies who may need a place of refuge once they go public with their story.  
  
No responsible man should rape a woman. Pastors who force themselves on vulnerable ladies should remember what Moses says in Deuteronomy 22: ‘if a man find a betrothed damsel in the field, and the man force her, and lie with her: then only the man that lay with her shall die’. Imams who violate girls should remember that ‘rape is committing zina (meaning illicit sexual intercourse) by force, hence rape is known as zina bi al-ikrah’. No sane society should tolerate or indulge rapists in any form. Stiff punishments should be meted out and publicized. This does not always serve as a deterrent to others which makes extremists suggest that a second time offender may need to forfeit his sexual organ to the state! No extant law has that provision in Nigeria. But is it worth considering?  
  
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