Horror tales of child rape in Gombe

Date: 2021-09-11

Source: https://thenationonlineng.net/horror-tales-of-child-rape-in-gombe/

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Victims seek funds for second surgery after failed one  
  
Activist: We’re frustrated by absence of legal instrument to deal with rapists  
  
By Sola SHITTU, Gombe  
  
IT was a bright and sunny day in Gombe, the capital city of Gombe State on December 9, 2020. Natwa Yakubu became thirsty on account of the rather harsh weather, so she sent Rifkatu, her five-year-old daughter, to buy her a sachet of iced water popularly called pure water.  
  
As it would later turned out, Rifkatu’s rather harmless mission turned into a tragedy that left permanent physical and psychological scars on the body and soul of the five-year-old who happened to be the only girl among the five children of the Yakubu family.  
  
On her way to the shop of the sachet water’s seller, Rifkatu was violently raped by an 18-year-old teenager who ambushed her on the way and took her to an uncompleted building some 200 metres away from the family house of the Yakubus at the extreme end of the Government Reserved Area (GRA) in Gombe.  
  
Ironically, the area is home to the high and mighty in the capital city, including senators, commissioners and many former public office holders. But Rifkatu’s family house was far flung from the serene atmosphere of the GRA. It was situated in an isolated area kept apart by a deep gully by an almost 30-metre wide gully, which makes this undeveloped part of the GRA inaccessible to both motorists and pedestrians.  
  
As the 18-year-old devil’s reincarnate violently defiled the hapless five-year-old, her father, a security guard, was at work while her mother was waiting patiently at home for the water she had sent her to buy.  
  
The violent act perpetrated against Rifkatu caused her to suffer serious tears that covered the entire section from her vagina to her anus, such that faeces now comes out through her vagina instead of her anus each time she defecates. And the situation has persisted in spite of a surgery that was carried out to correct the damage.  
  
But Rifkatu is not alone in the ugly fate that befell her. May, another rape victim, is currently battling with the injury she sustained after she was raped by an unidentified suspect.  
  
May, daughter of a herdsman, had been sent by her parents into the bush to look after their cattle in the absence of her brother. Her brother later came over to take charge of the cattle, but May was raped on her way home and the perpetrator of the heinous crime has since been at large while she is still lying in the hospital.  
  
“A surgery had been done before, but she had to come back for the second one because she is still defecating through her vagina,” said Christiana Agbo, the Kishimi Shelter and Care Foundation officer in charge of adolescent girl and child protection in Gombe State.  
  
She said, however, that the most worrisome rape case in her charge was that of Rifkatu who requires financial help to go for the second surgery in the bid to correct the damages done to her private parts by the man that raped her.  
  
“Imagine, we called the father to ask how much he had and he said he wanted to sell his goat to take her back to the hospital,” Agbo lamented.  
  
Rifkatu’s mother, 40-year-old Anyway Yakubu, a full time housewife, looked helpless when she spoke with the reporter, saying that they were hinging their hope on good hearted members of the public for a solution to the problem.  
  
She said: “The incident occurred on 9th December, 2020, and since then, we have been battling with how to correct the anomaly caused to her system by the rapist.  
  
“Sometimes I look at her and the pains she is going through at her tender age, and I break into tears. It is even more painful to me as a mother because I am helpless and cannot do anything to help my daughter.  
  
“I feel guilty that I was the one who sent her on errand and sometimes blame myself for what happened to her.”  
  
Although eight years old Daharatu Abubakar, another rape victim and eldest of the four children of 25 years old Zainab Abubakar now looks better after she was raped by a 65-year-old man who has since been charged and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by a law court, the scars of the attack linger.  
  
“It all happened around 6 pm on December 6, 2020,” said Daharatu’s mother, Zainab. “I sent her to buy me flour to make chinchin but she was attacked by the 65 years old man who grabbed her in the throat and covered her mouth.”  
  
Daharatu’s father, Garus Musa Abubakar, said he was in the market when he received a call that told him what happened to his daughter.  
  
“I cried on that day because she was in a very bad shape. She sustained serious injuries and had to be rushed to the hospital. As a father, I felt so bad about the incident,” he said.  
  
For Mrs. Grace Tony Samuel, the Executive Director of Kishimi Shelter and Care Foundation, the battle against rape and the attendant damages to the body and the psyche of survivors is becoming a frustrating one because the legal instrument to deal with the perpetrators, the Child Right Act, is yet to be domesticated in Gombe State.  
  
She said: “The state House of Assembly held a public hearing on it last week and we are not sure whether it is going to see the light of the day because there were some pockets of reactions there. Some people were kicking against the castration of rapists. It means they are not seeing it as a capital offence.  
  
“So, to me, it is frustrating and I feel that everybody must take responsibility — individuals, parents, CSOs, government and religious bodies — because the thing is skyrocketing. If we put ourselves in the place of the victims, maybe it will make us become more sensible.”  
  
Asked why perpetrators engage in rape, Mrs. Samuel dismissed the argument that the way and manner of dressing by victims often encourage it. According to her, rape has more to do with the mental status of the perpetrators.  
  
She said: “The survivors of rape, some are two years old and some are five years old. For God sake, what has this got to do with dressing? They don’t even know what dressing is all about.  
  
“So I will not subscribe to the argument that dressing is the issue. I think it is a psychological issue. And the moral decadence in the society is also part of it, because I don’t understand how a father will rape his own daughter.  
  
“Sometimes I begin to think whether it is occult, because we have seen cases of elderly persons who are 65 or 70 raping less than 10 years old girls. So I don’t get it.  
  
“Actually, I am confused about the whole thing because you can’t really point at any exact reason for rape.  
  
“During the COVID-19 lockdown, there were lots of rape cases and they were attributed to the lockdown which made everything to stand still and people clustered in one place. But now the lock down is over, so why is it still happening?”  
  
The Commissioner of Police in Gombe State, Ishola Babaita, however, believed that the battle against rapist in the state was being won and that rape cases had reduced drastically.  
  
Babaita said: “The offence of rape has become a very notorious crime and we are already making a very strong move to curb it drastically.  
  
“First, we have made sure that anyone caught with the offence of rape has no hiding place. Such a person will be charged to court. And we collaborate with the judiciary on this.  
  
“Some of the perpetrators have been seriously dealt with under the ambit of the law.  
  
“We also collaborate with NGOs for advocacy about the evil and create awareness on it. So with all these collaborations, it has come gradually under control.”  
  
Babaita said although it has been very difficult to find a clear reason for rape, it can be influenced by poverty.  
  
“What I mean is that it is poverty that makes parents to send their little children to hawk on the streets thereby exposing them to the danger of being raped. Some families depend on whatever little things their children could sell for them to survive.  
  
“Another reason could be traced to drug addiction. These days, you find so many youths and even adults engaging in drug addiction. When they are on drug, they can do anything including raping a little girl.  
  
“Some also say they do it for ritual purposes. But I am a policeman and I know we that cannot proof that before the court of law.”  
  
The state Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Barrister Zubair Umar, said the Child Rights Act is already going through some processes for it to be domesticated in the state.  
  
According to him, those areas that are considered controversial by stakeholders are already being addressed while advocacy is going on to ensure that the law scales all the hurdles.  
  
“We are working on it, and the state government under Governor Inuwa Yahaya is committed to seeing that the law is domesticated in the state,” he said.  
  
According to statistics from the office of Gombe State Commissioner for Internal Security and Ethical Orientation, Adamu Kufto, the state recorded 200 rape and 37 sodomy cases in year 2020 alone, with five other cases recorded in January of the year 2021 alone.  
  
He said 61 persons were also arrested for acts of gross indecency.  
  
According to the Commissioner, 40 rape cases were lodged in Gombe alone while 39 attempted rape cases were reported in the entire state.  
  
He lamented that the cases were often between fathers and their female children and all the victims are underage.  
  
“Thirty-seven were arrested for unnatural (gay and lesbianism) offences and 61 for act of gross indecency,” he said.  
  
The breakdown of rape and other unnatural offences in the 11 local government areas of the state showed that Gombe leads with 40 reported cases, followed by Akko 28 and Billiri 22.  
  
Others are Funakaye 17, Balanga 15, Nafada 15, Yamatu Deba 13, Dukku 13, Kwami 12, Kaltungo 12 and Shongom 2.  
  
Kufto noted that gender-based violence had been recognised as a human rights abuse “that leads to high rates of mortality including gynecological.”