Lagos rape cases

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For a crime that is most often unreported by victims, news that the Lagos State Government documented no fewer than 12, 120 rape cases in the last four years shows the disturbing depth of what has become a potent social issue. The state Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Mr. Ade Ipaye, who gave the information said the names of 140 sex offenders had been recorded in the Sex Offenders’ Register.  
  
Also speaking on the subject, the Director, the Office of the Public Defender (OPD), Mrs Omotola Rotimi, said the agency in the last one year recorded 526 rape cases, with 227 pending in court. It is worth noting that the OPD provides free legal aid to indigent people and its services in connection with rape cases reinforce the gravity of the offence from the standpoint of the state government.  
  
However, these statistics are inadequate to paint a picture of what progress, if any, has been made in the criminalisation of rape. It is not enough to talk about the number of rape cases officially noted without verifiable details of successful prosecution and punishment of the guilty to serve as deterrent. It needs to be stressed that when the legal consequences of rape are not so obvious, potential rapists may not be discouraged.  
  
Apart from punishing the crime, which is a secondary matter, it is of primary importance that victims should be encouraged to formally report the offence and to trust the legal system for justice.  
  
By opening a sex offenders’ register last year, the Lagos State Government took a significant step that deserves to be emulated by others at the state and federal levels. Ipaye said at a ceremony to launch the register: “The major aim of the Sex Offenders Monitoring Programme and the Mandated Reporter policy is to reduce repeat cases by providing names and personal details of convicted sex offenders in the state to a central database…The database will be accessible to individuals and organisations that need information. For example, school proprietors who want to recruit can access this register as a form of background check.” He added: “It is envisaged that the Lagos State Sex Offenders Register will be open and maintained by the Lagos State Ministry of Justice in partnership with the Lagos State Judiciary, the Nigerian Prisons and the Nigeria Police.”  
  
Notwithstanding the usefulness of monitoring sex offenders, it would be helpful to address the causes of rape, which at bottom reflects an objectification of femininity. It makes sense to regard rape as a mental health problem and rapists as individuals with mental health challenges. Given its anti-social nature, rape deserves condemnation in the strongest terms, and rapists also merit no less.  
  
It is observable that rape cases usually present peculiar difficulties that make trial of offenders a herculean task. However, this reality should not silence the collective voice of disapproval and everyone who desires a decent society should speak against the evil.  
  
It is apt to wonder whether rising incidents of sexual assault mirror the ineffectiveness of the apparatuses of socialisation, especially the structures of formalised religion. Rape is a moral minus that raises questions about nurture more than nature.  
  
What is to be done, considering the trauma that lingers after victims experience rape and the fear of stigma that restrains them from reporting their dehumanisation? Certainly, the justice system has an important role to help alleviate the psychological suffering of rape victims by ensuring that rapists are made to account for their misconduct. Also, the sting of stigma can be softened by a judicial process that appreciates the vulnerability and innocence of victims.  
  
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