PERSON OF THE YEAR 2019: The Rape Victim

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PERSON OF THE YEAR 2019: The Rape Victim  
  
How do you describe the horror of rape; that moment of profound terror, when the victims suffer savage intrusion into their core? While there are no words to depict the savagery of the attack and the trauma of the aftermath, disturbing narratives of little girls getting raped so brutally they might never heal again, and the HIV-positive pregnant woman or girl whose future child would likely be infected, thumps like a vicious kick in the groin, write ASSOCIATE EDITOR OLATUNJI OLOLADE AND GBOYEGA ALAKA.  
  
Child X’s testimony would make your skin crawl. At the tender age of two, Chrisland School (VGC) Supervisor, Adegboyega Adenekan, lusted after her prepubescent form. To fulfil his yearning, the 47-year-old allegedly slipped his hand under her uniform and put it in her ‘wee-wee.’  
  
Eventually, he raped her thus completing his cycle of molestation of the two-year-old left ina his care by her trusting parents.  
  
“When it was really really paining me, I screamed and he covered my mouth,” said the minor, to an Ikeja Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Court (ISODVC) in what was probably the most celebrated story of sexual abuse this year.  
  
Even though the crime was committed in 2016, the judgement happened deep into the year, on October 24, 2019.  
  
Revelations at the court sessions reverberated across the media landscape, inciting anger and indignation. Justice Sybil Nwaka, of the ISODVC was decisive in sentencing Adenekan to 60 years imprisonment without an option of fine.  
  
She also did not spare him her tongue. “This defendant is conscienceless, wicked, an animal and not fit to walk on the streets,” she declared.  
  
That case was one of the several rape cases – probably in hundreds – that jolted the nation to the prevalence of sex crimes this outgoing year.  
  
Recently, some civil society organization, students and other professional bodies thronged the roads of Port Harcourt, Rivers state, to stage a walk in protest against the rising cases of child sexual abuse. They declared that paedophilia and rape of minors a national emergency deserving urgent government intervention.  
  
Community Health Educator for Doctors Without Borders (DWB), Orogbum Health Centre, Veronica Uweh, who took part in the walk, stated that the DWB records 120 cases of rape every month on average and 70-80 per cent of the victims are under 15 years of age. She noted that victims who refuse to come out and report assault on them outnumber those who do.  
  
The statistics on rape in Nigeria depicts a worrisome situation. The National Violence Against Children Survey carried out in 2014 by the federal government established that one in four girls and one in 10 boys in Nigeria experience sexual violence before the age of 18 years.  
  
Also, about 84 per cent of females and 61 per cent of males, who experienced sexual violence before the age of 18 years do not know where to seek help.  
  
The Nigerian Bureau of Statistic (NBS) in a June 26, 2018 report, equally disclosed that a total of 2,279 cases of rape and sexual assaults were reported in 2017.  
  
However, only four percent of girls and two percent of boys in Nigeria received help after experiencing sexual violence against them.  
  
Most children and adults who get raped are raped by people they already know, like a sibling, a parent or other close relative. Sometimes, the assailant could be a family friend, a classmate, teacher, or school administrator — as it was in the case of Adenekan.  
  
The familiarity of the culprit encourages victims, oftentimes, to let down their guard.  
  
This contradicts general perception of rape as assault by a heinous stranger lurking in the shadows .  
  
Incestuous rape  
  
Manager of Salama Centre, Juliana Malama said 90 percent of all victims are sexually abused by people they know, most of who unfortunately move freely because of poor investigations.  
  
She said, “The centre has treated women and children who have been raped by their grandparents, fathers and uncles.”  
  
The case of Chukwuma Eze, who was docked and subsequently remanded at the Kirikiri Correctional Centre on the orders of the Ikeja Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Court for allegedly defiling his two teenage daughters is a good example.  
  
Eze, a resident of 2, Agbeke Close, Iyana-Era, Ijanikin, Lagos, was arraigned on a two-count charge bordering on defilement before Justice Abiola Soladoye on June 24, 2019. Even though he pleaded not guilty, Police prosecutor, Mrs T. Olanrewaju-Daudu, told the court that the defendant had unlawful sexual intercourse with his two daughters, aged 16 and 17, several times when they were seven and eight years old after the death of their mother.  
  
“Eze defiled the girls at knife point, threatening to stab them if they resisted him or told anyone,” Olanrewaju-Daudu told the court. To counter his ‘not guilty plea’, she also told the judge that eight witnesses had indicated their readiness to testify against the accused.  
  
In another instance, a 45-year-year-old man, Aderemi Adeleja, was remanded in a Correctional Centre, pending legal advice for allegedly defiling his 17-year-old daughter in her sleep. The mother who could not stomach it, reported the incident at Area F Police Command, Ikeja.  
  
Adeleja, who lived in Oshodi, Lagos was arraigned on a three-count charge of sexual assault and defilement. Chief Magistrate Olufunke Sule-Amzat ordered that he be remanded in prison for further hearing on February 2, 2020, after rejecting his plea.  
  
This is not to forget the story of 52-year-old Noel Davies, who confessed to the police of serially raping his 12-year-old daughter “out of foolishness.”  
  
Even though Davies, a staff member of Ekiti State University, confessed that his wife was aware and that he managed to convince her to conceal the shameful act, the daughter finally exposed him, when she confided in her teacher during a lecture on sex education.  
  
The victim told the Ekiti chairperson of FIDA (Federation of Women Lawyer), Seyi Ojo, who waded into the matter, that the ‘affair’ started a few years back when her father told her how special she was and started caressing her breast before he gravitated to sex.  
  
An all-year menace  
  
As early as January 3, the first major news of rape made the headlines. “Islamic cleric caught on camera defiling five-year-old.” For those who believe in omens, that news, breaking as early as the third working day of the year was too much of a bad sign.  
  
The cleric, ‘Alfa’ Abdulsalam Salaudeen, was caught on camera defiling a five-year-old girl, supposedly under his tutelage for Arabic and Quranic lessons. In what perhaps was a confirmation of a routine habit, a neighbour had painstakingly recorded the suspect in the act and presented the evidence to the then commissioner of police, Edgar Imohinmi.  
  
Former Police Public Relations Officer, CSP Chike Oti, said: “The CP, after watching the heart-rending video, directed the command’s undercover operatives attached to the State Intelligence Bureau to immediately arrest the culprit and hand him over to the gender section for a detailed investigation. The operatives went in search of the cleric and arrested him near a mosque in the Igando area of the state.”  
  
Salaudeen was said to have committed the offence on December 22, 2018 in Olorungbebe Mosque premises on Palace Road, Igando, Lagos. His case is in court and the last hearing was on October 14, 2019.  
  
In March, a teenage girl, Ngozi Eze, was reportedly raped to death by unknown persons at Imufu Community in Enugu Ezike, Igbo Eze North Local Government Area.  
  
Ngozi’s lifeless body was found in a bush behind Community Secondary School, Imufu, following a long search, after she did not return home as expected and was declared missing. The teenager had gone for her JAMB lessons preparatory to her UTME, when she met her sad fate.  
  
In the first week of November, the police busted a 26-man kidnap syndicate, arresting 65-year-old serial rapist, Demi Ejegi, in the process. Ejegi was caught in the act of defiling a three-year-old girl by operatives from Mabushi Division, Abuja. During interrogation, he confessed that he was sharing a meal with the child when the urge to violate her seized him.  
  
At about the same time, a barber, Ndubuisi Ohuonu, was arrested by youths of Isiala Ntighauzo Community of Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State over the alleged rape of an eight-year-old girl. The suspect, who rented a shop near the community market, was reportedly nabbed by the youths, who handed him over to the traditional ruler, who in turn invited the police. That story, however, took a curious turn, when the father of the victim, said to be away at the time of the incident, was arrested by the police for refusing to volunteer a statement.  
  
Still in November, 52-year-old Isiaka Afolabi was arrested by the Lagos State Police Command for the alleged rape of a 13-year-old girl. Afolabi, who worked as a gardener in a white garment church in Mushin, Lagos, reportedly laid in ambush for the victim while she ran an errand for her mother. He allegedly lured her into the church premises, where he lived, and forcibly had carnal knowledge of her.  
  
The victim’s mother became suspicious when she noticed an uneasiness in the teenager when she eventually returned. She grilled her over her whereabouts and when she reportedly opened up, the enraged mother reported the matter to a rights group, Advocate for Children and Vulnerable Persons Network of Nigeria, which linked up with the Area D Police and had Afolabi arrested.  
  
He has since been charged in court and remanded in a correctional facility.  
  
Busola Dakolo vs Biodun Fatoyinbo: The scandal that rocked the church  
  
Perhaps the most sensational story of rape in the year would be that of, Busola, ace photographer and wife of singer, Timi Dakolo.  
  
Busola had stunned the whole world when she granted a damning interview to an online medium, narrating how Pastor Biodun Fatoyinbo of the Commonwealth of Zion Assembly (COZA) raped her twice in a week, years back, before she turned 18.  
  
The debonair pastor however maintained his innocence, even threatening to sue.  
  
The court threw out the litigation filed by Mrs Dakolo for being “being empty and purely sentimental,” and statute-barred.  
  
Not done, the judge, Justice Othman A. Musa, also awarded costs of N1,000,000 against Busola Dakolo for wasting the court’s time, adding that it could have been ten times more.  
  
The case continues to generate reactions and emotions, with Mrs Dakolo insisting that the beleaguered pastor has not heard the last concerning the matter.  
  
The Port Harcourt serial rapist/killer  
  
The sudden news of a serial rapist and killer dubbed ‘Jack the Ripper,’ broke out in the wake of the Fatoyinbo-Dakolo saga. The culprit’s modus operandi, which involved raping and strangling young ladies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, seemed like the seal on a rather horrific trend.  
  
At the last count, eight ladies had fallen victim to the rapist-killer, who drugged his victims before raping them, and afterwards, tied their necks and legs with pieces of clothes in what the police suspected had a cult or ritual undertone.  
  
Palpable fear gripped the bubbly ‘garden city’. Who would be next? Ibim Seminitari, a former Commissioner of Information in the state, led a horde of women onto the streets to protest the killings, calling on the state government and the police to fish out the killer.  
  
Shortly after, the police announced the arrest of the killer: Gracious David West, aged 26. Between July and September, he combed the streets to satisfy what he told the police was an “irresistible urge to kill.”  
  
He was arrested September 19, 2019, while trying to perpetrate the same act with another victim, who woke up in time and raised the alarm.  
  
In all, it is difficult putting a figure to West’s total victims. First he confessed to ‘five girls in Port Harcourt, one in Owerri, and another in Lagos.’ But he stunned the court when he, on October 22 (2019) declared that he had murdered nine women. Alternative analysis put the total number of his victims at 15 women.  
  
And like a chilling climax to a macabre theatre, the murder and alleged rape of 500-level Rivers State University law student, Matilda Mark, recently made the news.  
  
Mark, 24, was reportedly stabbed to death by assailants in her private apartment outside the institution’s campus after raping her.  
  
The killers broke into Mark’s apartment at night and allegedly raped her before stabbing her to death, thus inciting outrage among her peers.  
  
Raped at 65  
  
And in a recent interview with The Nation, veteran actress, Taiwo Ajai-Lycett, 79, narrated how she was robbed and raped in 2006 at her house in Egbe. Then 65, she said, “I ran TAL House, a private school. I meant to do good with it but my staff orchestrated an attack on me. I was tied. I was beaten. I was brutalised. My health was ruined. I was blindfolded and raped. The man who raped me complained that he couldn’t gain easy entry into me because I wasn’t wet. I told him ‘widows don’t get wet.’ I kept talking to them and asked them repeatedly, ‘Are you doing this to your mother?’ Angrily, they taped my mouth but I remained fearless and prayed all through the attack.”  
  
After the incident, she shut down the school and left Egbe even though the business was flourishing, but she “wasn’t in it for the money.”  
  
She said, “The police came. They expected me to pursue the case. I knew the masterminds. I could have gotten them incarcerated but I simply moved on.  
  
Explaining the reason for the attack, she said, “They felt I was too strict. They were stealing from me and became openly hostile to me. They tried to take over my business,” she said, stressing that she had gotten over the episode.  
  
“I am over it. See, the mind is a beautiful thing. When you hold on to past hurt, you tie yourself down to grief. You get infected with its poison. Rather than wallow in grief and self-pity, I picked myself up and sought medical help, ensuring that they hadn’t infected me with any STD. Then I moved on.”  
  
‘Sexual violence has always been in our faces’  
  
Amid calls for urgent government intervention, Josephine Effah-Chukwuma, Executive Director of Project Alert on Violence Against Women, noted that, “We are in an epidemic situation. Hardly a day goes by without a report of one form of sexual abuse or the other. And these are those that made the headlines or of which the victims were bold enough to speak up.”  
  
Effah-Chukwuma, who recently celebrated 20 years of advocacy against domestic and sexual violence, argued that paedophilia, rape or any form of sexual violence is not new.  
  
She said, “Sexual violence has always been in our faces but we chose not to see it. And it’s not just sexual abuse, we are talking of the menace of child sexual abuse.  
  
It started with our girls but now it has reached our boys. Maybe that’s why we are seeing it now. Now we are getting dozens of boys being sodomised.  
  
“There is the case of a nine-year-old school boy who was sodomised for one year by a staff of his school in Calabar, with the mother not knowing. He started sodomising him since age eight, now the little boy is in diaper because he has fistula. So why are we playing the ostrich?”  
  
In two decades of advocacy, Effah-Chukwuma would single out the case of a prince of a notable royal house in Southwest Nigeria as her most harrowing. She said, “Here was a man who is the son of a prominent Oba, who went to school in the United States, met and married his Filipino wife, brought her home to Nigeria, started a family, and yet was sleeping with his eldest daughter. it was harrowing because this was a man who must have got all the training, got the best of education and so you couldn’t pin it to illiteracy or lack of exposure. Handling that case was also horrendous because we were up against institutions.”  
  
Rape cases are difficult to prove in the court of law “because we choose to make it difficult,” said Effah-Chukwuma, applauding the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act signed into law by former President Goodluck Jonathan shortly before he left office in 2015.  
  
Corroborating her, Ben Odeh, a lawyer and human rights activist, argued that Nigeria has enough laws against rape and child sexual abuse.  
  
He said, “There are various laws. We have the Administration of Criminal Justice Act. It is an act of the National Assembly passed in the year 2015. We also have the Administration of Criminal Justice Law of Lagos State, which I think is the domestication of the National Assembly act by Lagos State. There is also the Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State 2007; and the Child Rights Act and the Child Acts of Lagos State 2007. So we have enough legislations to deal with this menace but the challenge is the prosecution and implementation because these laws are supposed to be implemented by human beings.”  
  
According to him, the police are not trained to carry out proper investigation of rape cases. “What they do is a kind of question and answer; meanwhile they need proper forensic investigation for such cases. The truth is cases of rape are difficult to prove. That is in spite of the fact that the Administration of Criminal Justice Act has expanded its definition. In the past, rape was restricted to the penetration of the female genitalia by the male genitalia and it was a great challenge securing convictions. Usually, the defense counsel found ways to knock it off on technical basis.  
  
“But now, it involves any form of penetration -whether you use a stick, a finger or use your genital. This has made the prosecution easier. However, when a lady is raped, she is not supposed take her bath but go straight for a test, because usually the semen of the man is expected to still be in her body. Usually, the nexus has always been a problem. You must, under the law, be able to establish that there is a contact, which is that the man penetrated the woman. It even becomes more difficult when it is sexual defilement of young persons because of their immaturity and the fact that they may not talk early enough. The consolation, however, is that when you fail to gain conviction, you can also sue for assault.”  
  
Odeh cited 14-year imprisonment as the highest penalty for rape, adding that there has been advocacy that where the victim is a minor, it should be extended to life imprisonment.  
  
Taming the scourge  
  
Balqis Adegoroye, a clinical child psychologist argued that parents can help prevent sexual abuse of minors through open discussions of normal sexual development with their wards.  
  
According to her, specialists in child health including the paediatrician and other health workers are also in an ideal position to aid parents in these discussions and incorporate sexual development and abuse prevention into routine anticipatory guidance.  
  
Dr. Uwom O. Eze, Consultant in Pathology & Forensic Medicine, at the Department of Pathology University College Hospital, Ibadan, Oyo State emphasised, that, young adolescents also constitute another vulnerable group deserving special attention.  
  
“The high rates of sexual assault experienced by young people suggest there is an urgent need for preventive initiatives, which target young people population to be developed and to focus on adolescents using schools as prime sites of disseminating such prevention initiatives, with an increased emphasis on negotiating ethical and consensual relationships,” said Eze.  
  
He argued that while sexual assault can be prevented, there is urgent need for a paradigm shift in the campaign against the scourge.  
  
“Prevention efforts must recognize differences based on culture, sexuality, ability, age and gender. It also involves recognizing that although some men (and relatively few women) are clearly part of the problem and others are clearly already part of the solution, a great number of men and women fall somewhere in the middle,” he said.  
  
According to him, this bulk of people in the middle, especially the male gender, may be well-meaning men who are looking for opportunities and direction about what steps they can take in preventing sexual assault. It is therefore time for an all inclusive fight against sexual assault; a fight which should be devoid of sexist bias for greater efficacy; and a fight which indeed is attainable.