Scary statistics on rape of minors, others

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51 minors were sexually abused or raped in Enugu State between April and August. Activists and police paint similar pictures all over the country. Assistant Editor SINA FADARE takes a look at the hurdles preventing victims from getting justice as well as the psychological trauma afflicting child victims of sex predators  
  
It was supposed to be a private discussion between two friends, but it got leaked into public domain by chance. Ms. Olu Ilelabaje could not hold herself back at Mulero Bus-stop along Agege-Pen Cinema axis of Lagos metropolis. She was carried away with her discussion with a friend of hers, not minding who was listening, but the tenacity and the seriousness of her discussion attracted this reporter who was nearby waiting endlessly for a bus that refused to come.  
  
At some point, she looked at the side of this reporter when she guessed that he was equally paying a rap attention to what she was discussing with her childhood friend. Ore, (friend) she repeatedly asked, “How can a sensible man rape her own daughter who is just 11 years old?” At this point, she looked at the direction of her friend for an answer, her eyes misty and voice shaking. Though her friend scolded her with her eye that she should realise that the place was inappropriate to discuss such an issue, Ilelabaje’s tongue was wagging, battling within herself either to cry or to talk as if sharing her burden would help her overcome her challenges.  
  
By the time this reporter moved closer to her, telling her to relax, she quickly recovered, saying “thank you sir.” After knowing the identity of this reporter with a promise that she could get justice if she wanted any about what happened to her first born, she volunteered to pour out her mind later at her friend’s place. She alleged that her first husband, simply identified as Lookman, was a wife beater, which was the reason behind the collapse of their marriage. Since her mother-in-law insisted that she would not take the first daughter of the family away, the embattled woman left the first born behind when walking out of the marriage, but was allowed to go with the last born who was a year old when they separated.  
  
“Her mother promised to take care of the girl who was six years’ old then and that l am free to see her any time. But last year, l was told the father took the girl from his mother with the excuse that he needed someone to send on errands and this did not give me the opportunity to see her frequently as I used to do when she was with my mother in law.  
  
“But l was shocked when my friend who lives in the neighborhood, which my former husband stayed at Akowojo area, called me that l should leave everything l was doing and come over to her place. On getting there, l learnt that my daughter had narrated to her how her father had had sex several times with her.” Ilelabaje who said she almost collapsed when she was told and after interrogation, “my daughter told me everything her father has been doing to her with a strict warning that she should not tell anybody.”  
  
It took this reporter a lot of persuasions and assurances before Rukayat (not real name) could express her feelings and how her father cajoled her with a promise to buy her a lot of clothes and shoes before she was deflowered. According to her, the constant pain she was experiencing each time her father mounted her and his repeated warning not to discuss with anybody, including her friends, encouraged her to tell her mother’s friend.  
  
Amidst sobs, she narrated her experience: “The first night was painful and when the pain was much and I was crying profusely, my father went to a nearby chemist shop to buy me some pain relievers and toiletries for my use. He spared me for two days before she resumed and each time he wanted to do it, I was always in pain. That was when l told my mother’s friend. My father almost killed me for taking such a step.”  
  
Similarly, the experience of Wednesday September 10 will remain evergreen in the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Idris of No 11, Adedoyin Street, and Palm Grove, Lagos mainland. It was the day their 5 year old daughter, Mariam was sexually assaulted by a miscreant who took the advantage of the family’s absence from home. Both parents had gone out in search of means of livelihood, leaving their kids in the hands of their neighbours. The Nation gathered that the couple usually left home very early leaving the their three kids, two boys and a girl in care of their neighbours whose environment is surrounded with miscreants, who are always loitering around the neighborhood.  
  
That day, one of the miscreants identified as Michael a.k.a Iku (death) took advantage of the parents’ absence, and sneaked into the house while the other children were playing outside. When the father who came earlier saw her daughter, he found his daughter in an extremely calm situation, forcing him to ask her what was amiss. Upon more interrogation, she pointed to her private part, saying “this place is paining me.” At this point, the mother was said to have arrived from her daily routine and both examined their daughter’s private part and discovered semen and blood all over her. They both pleaded with the little girl to tell them what happened with a view to identifying the culprit. Mariam led her parents to the neighborhood where about 10 miscreants were having fun, and pointed to Michael as the culprit.  
  
Michael later confessed after he was arrested by the police from Pedro station. Investigation by The Nation revealed that Michael was a serial rapist in the vicinity and was always going scot-free because his father was one of the landlords. It was learnt that his father was using his influence to shield him whenever he committed the heinous crime.  
  
These cases are just a fraction of the numerous cases of violation of minors in the recent time, either by their father, hoodlum or rapist. And it seems the society is helpless in putting a check to all these social crimes. More worrisome is the age of these victims, ranging from age 3 to 11. Perhaps that was why a chief magistrate at Badagry Court, Mr. Abiodun Effi, refused to grant bail to Uche Umere, 22, for allegedly raping a three-year-old girl. He ordered him to be reminded at the Badagry Prisons till the next hearing of the case on October 21. Umere was arraigned on a two-count charge of sexual assault and indecent treatment of a child.  
  
The prosecutor, Inspector In  
  
nocent Uko, told the court that  
  
the accused committed the offence on July 2014 at Seventh Day Adventist Church, Badagry. Uko said that the accused lured the victims to the back of the Church and assaulted her sexually, adding that while he was carrying out his nefarious act, the victim screamed for help to the hearing of a passerby who rescued the girl from the accused. The big question that still remains unanswered is: What could have attracted any sane person to the extent of raping a three-year-old girl?  
  
Though there is poor statistical data on available incidences of minors rape in the country, the recent one made available in Enugu was not only alarming; it is gave cause for concern. The Executive Director of Women Aid Collective, Mrs. R. Ezeilo, said 51 minors were sexually abused or raped in Enugu State between April 2014 and August 2014. According to her, the cases include 30 rape cases, four attempted rapes, 10 sexual assaults, 37 defilements and 15 other cases of domestic violence, adding that the cases emanated from 14 local government areas of the state.  
  
Last February, while still serving as the commissioner of police in Lagos State, Umar Manko, now an Assistant Inspector General of Police, said no fewer than 132 rape cases were reported to the police in 2013. Although he did not give a breakdown of the figure and the people involved, the police boss said rape was among the 30 offences in the state. He added that while rape moved from 129 in 2012 to 132 in 2013, murder rose from 106 to 111 for the years under review, stressing that his command was working hard to reduce the incidents of crime in the state through the training of its personnel and the deployment of intelligence gadgets. This implies that no fewer than 11 girls or women were reportedly raped in the state every month last year, while one lady was raped every three days. Worse still, many of the recent rapes in the country involve very young children, including toddlers, who are sometimes raped by men old enough to be their grandfathers. In 2013, the Central Hospital, Benin, in Edo State, said it recorded no fewer than 80 cases of rape between March and mid-October. The pathologist who disclosed this, Dr. Jude Uchendu, said that more than 90 percent of the rapes were not committed by strangers, but by people well known to the victims, such as neighbours and blood relations.  
  
In the Niger Delta, one in ten women surveyed said she was either raped or survived a rape attempt last year, meaning that more women were raped in the region than any other part of the country last year, a recent crime survey published by CLEEN Foundation said. The incidence of rape in the region was higher than the national average by 100 per cent. The survey showed that the national average of victims was five per cent – one in every 20 women surveyed. It also showed that the national incidence of rape almost doubled from three per cent in 2011 to five per cent in 2013. “The incidence of rape has been on the increase from 3 per cent in 2011 to 5 percent 2013 within its geopolitical zones,’’ the report said.  
  
Similarly, in Kano State, no fewer than 100 cases of rape were recorded in Kano courts in 2013. Out of this number, only 40 rapists were convicted. Also, in Anambra State, some non-governmental organisations working on sexual violence last year recorded 115 incidents of rape, out of which 12 were investigated by the police. In February this year, a serial rapist was arrested by officials of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, for allegedly raping four children of different parents at Ndibe in Afikpo North Local Government Area of the state. These are just a few examples, as rape cases abound in all parts of the country.  
  
Although the reported cases are only a tip of the rape iceberg, as most cases are not reported because of the stigma attached to it in the country, the survey done by the CLEEN Foundation can provide a glimpse of the enormity of the problem. With 10 per cent incident of rape or attempted rape, the South-south region took the inglorious title of having the highest rape cases, followed by the North-east – 6 per cent, while the South-west region and North -west regions had statistics of one in every 25 women – four percent each. The North-central followed with three per cent – one in every 33 women polled, while the South -east had the lowest incidence rate of one in every 100 women. Interestingly, most of the victims – 36 per cent – told CLEEN Foundation they were raped near their homes. Another 19 per cent said they were attacked “at their homes” while 13 per cent said they were attacked in schools or workplace. When respondents were further asked to rate the prevalence of rape, “10 per cent believed it was very widespread, 33 per cent said it happened occasionally, 48 per cent believe it was non-existent while nine per cent said they do not know.’’  
  
Apart from the trauma and injuries sustained in the process, experts say it is a gross violation of the fundamental human and natural rights of the victims. While the stigma is enormous, the trauma suffered by the victims cannot be restituted. The Nation gathered that the punishment for rape, as spelt out in Section 358 of the Criminal Code, is life imprisonment, while an attempt to commit rape attracts 14 years imprisonment. In spite of the stringent penalty for rape, it still thrives because of bottlenecks of legal technicalities, and unwillingness of victims to pursue their cases to logical conclusions. Speaking to The Nation on the current waves of defiling minors in the recent time, Modupe Araoye, a legal practitioner at Falana & Falana’s chamber, said the situation is not only worrisome but a national calamity.  
  
Araoye, who said the major cause of minor sexual assault in the society is poverty, noted that most of those that are affected may either be a house help or those leaving in a face-me-I-face-you apartment. She regretted that the situation is so rampant in the recent time to the extent that the chamber is handling about two cases of sexual assaults on a nine and six year old girls respectively.  
  
“Why would a parent send her daughter of six or nine years old child from the East to Lagos to go and work as house help and you still get money over such a child? A child that is supposed to be in the school, it is a pathetic situation l cannot comprehend it,” she explained.  
  
She equally blamed the rampancy of minors on the fact that it has always been difficult to prove a case of a rape beyond reasonable doubt in the court. This is because, most times, the defendants always insist on an eye-witness account, which is very difficult. “In most cases, the accused are always set free by the court for lack of evidence.” The lawyer also argued that such men who find themselves in such a situation should be sent to a psychiatric home for evaluation because she could not see what could attract a man in a 3 to 6 years’ old girl.  
  
But a clinical psychologist, Dr.  
  
Wale Folarin, sees the issue of  
  
rape, particularly of minors, as a psychology trauma that needs to be treated as such. Folarin pointed out that the inability of a rapist to control or channel his libidinal energy towards a productive use often leads him to rape minors without thinking of the consequences. According to him, there are three levels of personality traits, the ID, the Ego and the Super Ego. “Rapists are not able to control their ID due to their high libidinal traits and they need immediate satisfaction no matter the consequences. This, in most cases, leads them to committee rape with impunity”  
  
The clinical psychologist said that early maturity cell in most girls this days is very high to the extent that a girl of 11 years old has developed an adult traits, which made them a target of a would-be rapist. He emphasised that rapists need psychological therapy in order to bail them out of the emotional bondage they find themselves, just as he canvassed for a holistic approach that would involved all in order to reduce the menace of rape of minors.  
  
A celebrated actress who was a victim of rape, Mrs Foluke Daramola, said poverty played a significant role in the raping of minors or a father raping her daughter.  
  
“The issue of raping minors is so alarming these days that one could reduce it to the issue of poverty. In a situation where a family are squeezed in a room apartment that consists of a father, mother and grown up female children, anything can happen in the night.”  
  
Mrs Daramola, who has floated a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Passion Against Rape in Africa, to address such an issue, lamented that if care is not taking a girl who experienced rape may not get out of such trauma in her life time. “I am a case study. l have to go through a lot of psychological therapy before l could get out of the trauma l faced. In fact, it contributed to the collapsed of my first marriage because l was not emotionally stable,” she told The Nation. She therefore advised that mothers have to be more vigilant about their female children, and knowing them intently. If this is done, she believes that female children will be free to discuss any issue any time they run into any crisis, thereby having somebody to confer in.  
  
But, Rev. Elijah Ashafa, the pastor of Christ Kingdom Baptist Church, Magboro, Ogun state, said only the intervention of God can curb the incessant raping of minors in the society. Ashafa, while speaking with The Nation, noted that there should be ways to minister the gospel of Christ to rapists, even as the law takes its course on them, so they can come out refined and re-orientated. “Putting them behind bars does not solve the problem alone because the spirit is still there and must be addressed with spiritual effort to change the person. We have seen cases of even a professor dating a fourteen years’ old girl, with all the knowledge he has acquired and this is because something is still missing in his life that is Christ, It is not a matter of going to church, genuine encounter with Christ is what matters, then every other thing will follow,” he noted  
  
Could it be that the society is tilting towards the biblical Sodom and Gomorra where morality has been thrown to the dust bin? Against this backdrop, Mr. Friday Okonofua, an obstetrician and gynecologist, said political commitment is needed to reduce the high incidence of rape. Okonofua, who is a programme officer for Ford Foundation (West Africa), said: “The rising incidence of sexual abuse of minors in the country is evidence that our policies and laws are not working. In other countries, when such happens, the perpetrators will be sent to life imprisonment or punished. But in Nigeria, we have some laws and policies that are not being implemented. There are penalties for people who commit such offences, but people are afraid to come out because they feel that nothing will be done.”  
  
He urged the law enforcement agents and the judiciary to live up to their responsibilities and quicken the dispensation of justice.  
  
Araoye recommended that rapists should be sent to life imprisonment. For Mrs Daramola, death sentence is good for rapists for making their victims permanently losing their emotional bearing.