The Nation Newspaper

Date: 2018-05-15

Source: https://thenationonlineng.net/rape-epidemic/

Rape epidemic  
  
•The world may be alarmed at the Indian scourge, but Nigeria is piling up its victims  
  
It is shocking that, within days, two teenage girls were reportedly raped and set on fire in the eastern Indian state of Jharkhand. Rape is bad enough; burning rape victims compounds the evil. The latest victim, a 17-year-old girl, suffered burns to 70 percent of her body. She was allegedly sexually assaulted in the house of a relative by someone she knew, and then set on fire. Neighbours rescued her. A local man was arrested in connection with the attack, and investigations are continuing.  
  
In the first reported attack in Jharkhand about two weeks ago, the victim, a 16-year-old girl, was allegedly burnt to death. She had been kidnapped from her home and taken to a nearby forest where she was raped by several men. The police arrested 15 people in connection with the crime.  
  
It is commendable that the police responded by making arrests, but arrests are not enough. The incidents are condemnable and those who carried out the inhuman attacks should be severely punished. It is disturbing that both attacks occurred in Jharkhand. The authorities should act to ensure that the brutal crimes do not set an unwanted trend in the community. It is noteworthy that about 100 sexual assaults are reported to police in India daily; and there were nearly 39,000 alleged attacks in 2016.  
  
The gravity of India’s rape crisis is highlighted by a recent executive order by the government, introducing the death penalty for rapists of children under the age of 12. The law will come into effect after its endorsement by India’s parliament.  
  
Nigeria is also facing alarmingly high cases of rape, which makes the incidents in India locally relevant. Though national statistics on rape are unavailable, there is no question that, going by the reported cases, rape is unfortunately on the increase nationwide. Indeed, it may be said that the problem is very close to crisis point, considering recent reports of cases where the victims were children and the elderly.  
  
It is laudable that in Nigeria the anti-rape campaign is also growing in intensity. Last September, for instance, an NGO, Saab Foundation, put rape on the front burner by organising a campaign tagged ‘Walkathon against rape’ in Ilorin, the Kwara State capital. The campaign involved a march around the city by the group’s members and supporters who carried placards to raise awareness of gender-based violence, particularly rape. Quoting statistics supplied by the state’s ministry of women affairs, the group’s founder, Sa’adat Bibire, said over 1,000 women were raped in Kwara State in 2016.  
  
Bibire was quoted as saying: “I am calling on the National Assembly and the 36 Houses of Assembly to make laws against rape and other domestic violence stricter and more enforceable. They need to do something. They are representing us and they need to stand for us. It could be their sisters, friends and mothers.”  
  
In February, a Nigerian anti-rape activist, Mrs Itoro Eze-Anaba, was honoured by the Queen of England, Elizabeth II, for her exemplary activism. Eze-Anaba, who received the Commonwealth Points of Light, in 2013 founded Nigeria’s first sexual referral centre, known as the Mirabel Centre, which has reportedly given support to over 3, 100 rape victims.  
  
In March, Lagos State Governor Akinwunmi Ambode led a symbolic walk against domestic and sexual violence in Alausa, Ikeja, calling for all hands on deck in the fight against rape. With a Sexual Offences Court, the Protection Against Domestic Violence Law, 2007, the Child’s Right Law of Lagos State, 2015, and the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2015, the state is making serious efforts to tackle sexual violence. Other states should emulate Lagos.  
  
Tackling rape requires practical action, particularly in the areas of restraining laws and enforcement institutions. Rape is a crime that should be punished with severity to underline its unacceptability.