The agonies and travails of ‘rape victims’ in Nigeria

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The agonies and travails of ‘rape victims’ in Nigeria  
  
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The pervasive violence against women, especially rape of women and girls in Nigeria is saddening. The media in Nigeria is replete with rape and sexual assault stories, many of these with gory endings. ALAO ABIODUN writes.  
  
Rape has become an epidemic in Nigeria. The victims are not just women, but men and boys as well – underage boys are being defiled too. Rape, just like other forms of sexual abuse can happen to anyone of any age, gender, race, and socioeconomic background – at any time or place.  
  
Rape cases in Nigeria just like many other parts of the countries flourishes on ‘victim blaming’, not just from family members, but from the society and even the security operatives. In many case, women are never believed because there is a sort of difficulty in establishing the crime.  
  
Under the Criminal Code of Nigeria (Section 357 & 358), Rape is defined as “having unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or by means of false act, or, in case of a married woman, be personating her husband.” This offence is punishable by imprisonment for life, with or without caning.  
  
Inspite of the prevalence of rape and sexual violence in Nigeria, and the laws that exist to govern rape are not strictly adhered to. That’s why many of the raped victims hide in guilt and shame while the evil perpetrators continue with their brazen impunity. The Nigerian Criminal Code recommends life imprisonment for the perpetrators of rape and 14 years for attempted rape.  
  
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However, over the years, many advocacy groups have campaigned rigorously for a stricter model that involves a comprehensive investigation, prosecution of offenders, and rehabilitation of victims. A study conducted by the United Nations Children’s Fund found that one in four girls and one in 10 boys have experienced sexual abuse at some point.  
  
Daily, the media is always awash and littered with headlines such as; 60-year-old man rapes a 10-year-old, 28-year-old man defiles minor, 50-year-old rapes 4-year-old, and many more. This sad tale has become the norm in the media. The rising rate of pedophiles and sexual attraction to babies is alarming. Nigerians are inundated with stories of such happenings on a daily occurrence.  
  
Some men are mostly the predators; some simply launch out, recklessly hunting for hapless targets in order to satisfy their sexual desires. Added to this difficulty is the stigma attached to rape.  
  
According to a news report, a 42-year-old father, Taofeek Oyeyemi, was arrested for allegedly impregnating his 16-year-old daughter in Ogun State. The father of 17 children was said to have taken his daughter to a quack for an abortion after discovering that she was pregnant for him.  
  
After the abortion, the state Police Public Relations Officer, Abimbola Oyeyemi, said in a statement that the victim started bleeding profusely and informed her mother who reported to the Ewekoro Police Station, where officers were mobilised to arrest her father.  
  
This culture of trivialising sexual abuse is what convinces many survivors to stay mute about their experiences.  
  
In Nigeria, the situation with documentation of rape cases is even more complicated because the majority of Nigerian hospitals are not equipped with rape kits. This means that they are incapable of aiding victims in the prosecution process.  
  
The horrendous statistics on rape has shown the degree of moral decadence in the society and the consequences it has triggered. Some victims of rape now resort to committing suicide to end the shame they did not bring upon themselves. The frequency of these rape occurrences is alarming because the relevant institutions seem not to be addressing these crimes by dealing with the perpetrators.  
  
Sadly, the laws on rape and defilement as they are at present are skewed in favour of the perpetrator to the detriment of the victim. Rape conviction numbers are abysmally low against the prevalence of rape in our country.  
  
Interestingly, the Social media has become a useful tool of engagement for survivors of different forms of assault to speak up. Hinging on its advantage as a platform for the #MeToo campaign, its advent has seen the heightened movement of people addressing issues that would have remained buried.