Navigating the reality of gender-based violence

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Sir: In Nigeria and even the world at large, there is an existence of a persistent haunting shadow, which is the pervasive issue of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Despite strides in various spheres, this deeply entrenched problem continues to cast a dark cloud over the lives of many, disproportionately affecting women, children, and marginalized communities.  
  
The stark reality is that SGBV in Nigeria is a multifaceted crisis, manifesting in various forms such as rape, domestic violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking. Reports, according to UNICEF, show that one in four females in Nigeria have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18, marking a distressing reality that demands urgent attention.  
  
Deeply rooted cultural norms often perpetuate this crisis. Traditional beliefs and gender stereotypes reinforce power imbalances, contributing to the normalization of violence against women and vulnerable groups. Victims often face immense pressure to remain silent due to fear of stigma, social repercussions, or lack of faith in the judicial system’s ability to deliver justice.  
  
However, one of the significant challenges in combating SGBV in Nigeria lies in the inadequate response and support systems. Insufficient legal frameworks, lack of access to justice, and limited resources dedicated to victim support further exacerbate the issue. Additionally, underreporting cases due to fear or distrust in the system creates a vast gap between the actual incidents and those officially documented.  
  
The devastating reality of sexual assault is a distressing scenario that no parent ever wishes to imagine, let alone experience. Yet, the statistics paint a stark picture in which our daughters, sisters, and friends could become victims. As a parent, the thought of your daughter enduring such a traumatic experience can be overwhelming, leaving you grappling with a multitude of emotions like fear, anger, confusion, and a profound sense of helplessness. When faced with the haunting “what if” of your daughter being a survivor of sexual assault, the initial shock can be paralyzing.  
  
However, it’s essential to recognize that despite the weight of the situation, there are steps you can take to support your daughter through this dark and challenging time.  
  
The cornerstone of support begins with fostering an environment where open dialogue and trust thrive. Let your daughter know you are there for her, ready to listen without judgment whenever she feels comfortable talking. Encourage her to express her emotions in her own time and assure her that her feelings are valid and heard.  
  
In the wake of such trauma, professional support can be invaluable. Consider reaching out to therapists, counsellors, or support groups specializing in trauma and sexual assault. These professionals can offer guidance, providing tools and strategies to navigate this distressing journey. Reporting the assault to law enforcement and seeking medical attention are critical steps.  
  
Amidst the darkness, there are beacons of hope. Grassroots organizations, activists, and individuals tirelessly championing the cause are driving positive change. Their resilience and growing public awareness and advocacy signal a shift in societal attitudes and a collective determination to combat SGBV. Together, as a family and a community, we can work towards a world where our daughters are safe, respected, and free from the threat of sexual violence. The eradication of sexual and gender-based violence as a whole in Nigeria necessitates a concerted effort from all sectors of society. It requires policy reforms and a cultural shift that values and respects the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender. By standing united, fostering empathy, and amplifying the voices of survivors, Nigeria can pave the way for a future free from the shackles of SGBV. It’s a long and challenging journey, but it promises a brighter, safer, and more equitable Nigeria for future generations.