Contending with upsurge of rape cases

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In recent times, the Nigerian media has reported the increasing frequency of rape cases across the country. The upsurge, especially of gang rapes and rapes of girls by miscreants, relatives and neighbours, should rightly become a source of concern to all.  
  
Though a global phenomenon, the appalling side to our experience of its menace here has to do with the impunity of the perpetrators, lacklustre response of justice administrators and absence of institutional supportive system to help the victims.  
  
Perhaps, more worrisome is the fact that a large number of suspected rapists roam freely on the streets after committing the heinous act. Equally bothersome is that the act has now assumed a new dimension whereby victims are sometimes gang-raped in broad daylight with crowds hanging around as mute spectators of a salacious drama while victims are groped, stripped and assaulted. Another sad aspect is that the victim is occasionally blamed while little is done concerning our apparently weak laws.  
  
The rape epidemic in our society sadly reflects the extent to which women’s rights are threatened. This calls to question not only our sense of justice but our civilisation. The big question, of course, is why do men rape? Most experts believe the primary cause of rape is an aggressive desire to dominate the victim rather than an attempt to achieve sexual fulfilment. They consider rape an act of violence rather than principally a sexual encounter. This is the opinion of experts. But one is of the opinion that besides the desire to dominate, rape can also be situated in the state of minds of perpetrators.  
  
The brazen manner rape is often committed indicates that perpetrators still have a Stone Age mentality of women as chattels who are to be used without independent thoughts. It also portrays some as pure lunatics. Or, what do we think of such recent reported case of a 14-year-old, who was gang-raped to death by some miscreants in Lagos. The Junior Secondary School 3 student on holiday was said to be alone at home when the hoodlums fiercely gained entry into her parents’ apartment and took turns to rape her. The miscreants, according to reports, usually hanged out in a smoking joint in the Abule- Ado area of Lagos State.  
  
Perhaps, more horrifying is the case of a 21-year-old lady who was gang-raped by five men on her way to work early around 5:30 am at the Irawo area of Owode-Onirin, Ikorodu, Lagos in May 2017. Most Nigerians would still not have forgotten an incident that occurred in 2011 when a woman, repeatedly asked her attackers to kill her as they took turns to rape her at a hostel at a university in the South-East. There was also the abominable case of a dad who raped her 12-year-old daughter as reported in the Daily Sun of October 16, 2012.  
  
Cases of security men especially police officers “re-raping” rape victims have not escaped our memory either. In 2014, an Amnesty International report listed rape as one of the methods allegedly being used by the Nigeria Police to extract confession from female suspects. Again, most often, police officers purportedly ask rape victims irrational and dispiriting questions. Sadly, the military is no better.  
  
As if to prove a US novelist and feminist, Marilyn French, right, over her submission that: “All men are rapists and that’s all they are. They rape us with their eyes, their laws, and their code”, voice against rape is still criminally silent, the law against rape is ineffective, institutions to render support are sick and culpable of the act while our leaders seem helpless. We tend to reduce the problem to issue of indecent dressing as if the kids that the “beasts” violated also attracted them with indecent dress.  
  
Millions of Nigerians continue to believe that women invite trouble on themselves by being careless. Mothers often chide daughters for wearing “provocative” clothing, in most cases a sleeveless garment or a pair of hip-hugging jeans. Though one is against indecent dressing, it could not be a justification for raping. Come to think of, is indecent dressing a “rapeable” offence?  
  
Dramatic changes have to take place in public attitude towards rape if we are ready to stem the tide. Steps towards this direction include public enlightenment and education campaign as well as institutional support. Strikingly, all these are being offered at the Lagos State Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation and Ministry of Justice through the Office of Public Defenders. WAPA has trained health workers drawn from primary and secondary health facilities in the state in women’s rights, gender-based violence and the management of the GBV survivors. The health workers were trained to serve as change agents through which statistics on rape and other forms of violence can be got from. Documentation by health facilities can be useful as evidence to get a no contest order in criminal proceedings against perpetrators.  
  
While one cannot say this has drastically impacted on the fight against rape, it is undoubtedly a step in the right direction. Therefore, one strongly recommends that other relevant stakeholders equally evolve new strategies that would assist in tackling the menace in our country. The heinous crime represents a slap on our collective sensibility and as such must be frontally addressed.  
  
Rasak Musbau, Ikeja, Lagos  
  
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