Many police officers are hostile to female rape victims –Consultant psychologist

Date: 2020-06-15

Source: https://punchng.com/many-police-officers-are-hostile-to-female-rape-victims-consultant-psychologist/

Dr Adebimpe Oluwafisayo is a Consultant Psychologist at the College of Medicine, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho. She speaks with DAYO OJERINDE on female rights and how rape can be curbed, among other issues  
  
What rights do the females have?  
  
Women should be seen as human beings and be given opportunities to prove their worth. They should be given equal education opportunities to raise their status. The government should enact laws against women abuse. Cultural, religious and societal norms entrenched must be guided. Women, who are prematurely and compulsorily betrothed to a man at birth, are not allowed access to basic education and are generally burdened with household chores. These become the foundation for a lifetime of circular and absolute dependence on a man she does not know.  
  
Why do you think there is so much emphasis placed on the male child in Nigeria?  
  
Our country is patriarchal in structure based on inequality and injustice, which has led to gender stereotyping. The well established social norms, which support these gender relations, were culturally transmitted from one generation to another through the process of socialisation. During the early stages of development till adulthood, we are exposed to many factors, attitudes and behaviour regarding gender descriptions within the family setting. These have generated differences in the pattern of parenting styles of sons and daughters, which allow more privileges for the boy child.  
  
Nigeria is a society that places a high premium on the male gender. A male child is perceived as an asset that is highly treasured; priority is usually given because of the cultural perception of their role as breadwinners. For females, the belief is that they will eventually marry and ‘come under’ their husbands hence they are treated as second class citizens, which perpetuates the superiority of the male.  
  
Although there are no jobs the females cannot do, but it seems the society has restricted them to some kinds of jobs. What is the way out of this situation?  
  
Gender stereotypes exist in all facets of life. Being female should not be a disadvantage and does not translate to being relegated or restricted. Most women are seen to be tough and rigid when they are empowered or in power. If they are in position of authority, they become too direct and non-manipulative, which could lead to unhealthy rivalry among the people they work with. Our society sometimes unconsciously delegates or tags roles for individual, which have considered male and female based on socio-cultural norms.  
  
We have lived with erroneous impression that certain barriers to progress are a matter of nature, whereas they are manifestation of nurture, which is subject to change. This could be a subjective perception of what a man or woman should be or how people should behave. Men are described as intellectual, competent, strong and brave, while women are homely, warm and expressive, domineering, territorial and passive. They portray the male as the strong, dominant person with leadership traits, while the female is usually portrayed as being subordinate and confined to the home and therefore should be exempted from male dominated professions.  
  
Even in politics and leadership positions in Nigeria, the role of deputy is often reserved for women? Do you think women are not doing enough to change this stereotype?  
  
From time immemorial there exists the degenerate believe that women are second class citizens, who are being considered as a man’s property or pleasure object and a machine meant for producing children though this has reduced due to western education and modern reorientation. Gender inequality in Nigeria is promoted by religious and communal customs. This has grave consequences for both the individual and the society at large. However, in the Nigerian context, gender discrepancy in politics is sustained by cultural factors; this has very serious implications on the women’s ability at self-actualisation.  
  
What do you think is responsible for the recent rise in rape cases?  
  
Rape is a natural product of patriarchal social relations in which males are schooled in the art of dominance, while females are taught to submit. It is an act of violence deployed by certain men to maintain their pre-eminence in the prevailing gender hierarchy. Rape has always been a part of human culture. The myths of antiquity included accounts of rape; ancient societies counted rape among the crimes listed in law codes; and even the Bible contains stories of rape.  
  
Rape has had an impact on individual women (as well as men and children of both sexes), but it has also affected the evolution and development of cultures all over the world, as women have been abducted as brides, claimed as prizes of war and enslaved. Unfortunately, rape remains a concern of modern life. The physical reality of rape has not changed over time: the penetration of a vagina, or other orifice, by a penis (or other objects) without the consent of the woman or the man being penetrated. What have changed over time and places are definitions of rape, ideas, perceptions and laws concerning it. Modern laws on sexual assault recognise that both women and men can be raped, that wives can be raped by their husbands, and that victims often know their attackers.  
  
Subgroups of rape victims may include gays and lesbians, prisoners of either sex, or the disabled, among others. Rape crises services, law enforcement agencies and laws now recognise that it is not just young women, who are the victims of sexual assaults; men, who may or may not be gay, rape other men. Children too are victimised. Often, their molesters are not caught, but the recent publicity concerning the molestation of children has focused public awareness on this crime.  
  
How can rape acts be curbed?  
  
There must be stringent rules and disciplinary measures guiding rape across all the states of the federation. There must be initiation of public education programmes i.e. advocacy, awareness and sensitisation on ending violence against women. This could be done through the mass media and social media in all indigenous languages and the lingua franca for ease of communication; domestication of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; systematic and comprehensive documentation of cases of violence against women; service providers and criminal justice officials should endeavour to maintain the confidentiality and respect the privacy needs of victims; and harmonisation of punishment for rape with the gravity of the crime.  
  
There must also be gender sensitivity training for the police and security forces, lawyers, judges and other officials in the criminal justice system; repeal of the Public Officers Protection Act to ensure that it does not prevent or hinder prosecution of state actors charged with rape; and urgent publication of the reports and recommendations of the national and state assemblies and the House of Representatives Committee on the Review of Discriminatory Laws against Women as well as an action plan for its implementation.  
  
Why do you think rape victim don’t report about abuses against them?  
  
Reactions from society often involve some blame of the victim’s behaviour. It is not unusual that the victim blames herself for the rape and the public’s attitude may increase this feeling. Blame and doubt by the public most likely stem from their psychological defence system rather than from an uncaring attitude. This mind-set is partly a result of an unconscious conviction that those who behave appropriately will escape trouble, which also strengthens our sense of security and control. Another reason is that placing blame on the victim relieves oneself of the responsibility to take action and help.  
  
One commonly believed myth is that rape is primarily a sexual act. Persons with this belief often unintentionally place the victim on trial. Her motives, her dress and her actions become suspect not only to law enforcement officials, but also to her family and friends. The woman’s credibility may be questioned and her sexual activity and private life may be made public. Perhaps because of the guilt, embarrassment and humiliation, rape has been a highly underreported crime.  
  
Why do so many women choose to remain silent after being sexually assaulted?  
  
One should look at the three institutions, which the victim will come in contact with: the police, the hospital and the court.  
  
The police: Most officers have probably had little, if any, training in dealing with rape. Later, the case is referred to an investigator, who most likely works with all types of assaults. In some cities, female police officers are used to investigate rape cases; however, most investigations are still conducted by males. Unfortunately, many police officers are antagonistic towards the female rape victim. They may feel embarrassed themselves at having to question a woman about a sexual assault. Very often, police questioning focuses on the woman having brought the attack on herself by her dress, her inviting a man to her house, accepting a ride from a man, going to a bar unescorted, or by her past sexual experiences. The officer may dwell on the sexual aspect of the rape, asking her to describe her feelings during the attack, the rapists’ genitals, or the position in which he raped her. Fortunately, in many areas of the country, the police are establishing special rape units and training police personnel to work with rape victims.  
  
The hospital: Whether or not a rape victim intends to report an attack to the police, she should obtain medical care. When a woman, who has been raped arrives at a hospital, medical personnel have a two-fold responsibility. They must treat the patient and also provide evidence for the police that a rape did occur. In addition to checking a victim’s entire body for injuries, a doctor should explain to her when she must return for pregnancy and venereal disease tests. A doctor will check for the presence of semen in the vagina as well as on other parts of her body and clothes. A rape victim should not wash herself before going to the hospital and her clothing should be made available for the investigation. Doctors in hospital emergency rooms, where most rape victims are taken to, do not always react sympathetically. Here, too, women frequently report that they are subjected to hostile and irrelevant questions.  
  
The court: A woman may report an assault to the police but choose not to press charges. However, if she does decide to file a complaint and the rapist is arrested, she may come to feel that she, and not the rapist, is the person on trial. With few exceptions, statements by these victims describe their court experiences as unpleasant and difficult. While the police and medical personnel often subject a rape victim to unfair questions, in the courtroom she must endure even more. Rape is defined as a crime against the state and the victim is a witness for the prosecution. She may choose to have her own attorney, but that person only serves as an advisor; the court appoints the prosecutor over whom she will have no control. The victim will often be attacked by the defence attorney on three major issues.  
  
Consent: How much did she resist? Many rapists have been released on the grounds that a rape did not occur because the victim did not struggle. In no other crime will this issue be raised. If a person is robbed, she is not expected to resist the robber and refuse to surrender her money.  
  
Corroboration: A few states still require that another witness testifies that the rape took place or that there is some evidence such as the victim’s injuries or the presence of semen. If the victim was not harmed or she delayed reporting the rape so that the semen has disappeared, there will be no physical evidence and the case may be dismissed. Going back to robbery, one does not have to prove that she was carrying a wallet in order to charge someone with theft.  
  
Chastity: The victim’s past sexual behaviour is often presented as evidence on behalf of the defendant. Testimony by a rape victim, who admits to having sexual relations with someone to whom she is not married, is used as proof that she is immoral and, therefore, she is likely to have consented to intercourse. Conversely, the past crimes of the defendant are not admissible as evidence. Acquittals in jury trials have been based on the admission by the victim that she had gone to a bar alone, that she was hitchhiking, that she showed no evidence of physical abuse, that she was dressed seductively, and that jury members found her unattractive (thus, why will anyone rape her?).  
  
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