Rape epidemic: Rapists prey on minors, parents worried

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Cases of sexual violence against minors by domestic workers and close family friends are on the increase. ONOZURE DANIA reports recent cases with possible solution  
  
Popular Nollywood actor, Olanrewaju James, alias Baba Ijesha, was sentenced on July 14, 2022, to 16 years’ imprisonment by a Lagos State Domestic Violence and Special Offences Court for the defilement of a 14-year-old girl.  
  
James had defiled the minor when she was seven years old and committed the same offence seven years later.  
  
This time around, he was caught in the act.  
  
Again, on July 4, 2022, a nurse, identified only as Ebele, was excited that she finally got justice for her daughter and niece, who were aged six and seven when they were defiled by a housekeeper, Bright Izuchukwu, whom she employed to look after them in her absence.  
  
She employed Izuchukwu, who was then aged 27, between December 2016 and June 2018, at her home in Festac Town, Lagos.  
  
The convict used his knowledge of the location of a Close Circuit Television installed in the house to avoid being captured when he committed the crime.  
  
“I always gave my daughter sex education, and from time to time, I asked my daughter whether anyone touched her private parts.  
  
“On July 17 or 18, 2018, I asked her if anyone touched her private parts. She said Izuchukwu used to place her on his lap and insert his fingers into her private parts, and he subsequently inserted his manhood into her private parts.  
  
“She said the defilement occurred in the study room in a certain area of the house. I have CCTV cameras mounted all over my home, but it is not reflected in these parts of the house,” the mother said.  
  
Izuchukwu got a life sentence for the crime.  
  
In a judgment on June 27, 2022, the Appeal Court in Lagos upheld the judgment of an Ikeja Special Offences Court which sentenced a driver, Francis Apai, to 15 years’ imprisonment for raping his employer’s 18-year-old daughter in Lagos.  
  
The convict was sentenced by Justice Sherifat Solebo on June 11, 2020, after finding him guilty of one count of sexual assault by penetration.  
  
Dissatisfied with the judgment, Apai went to the appellate court to challenge his conviction and sentence.  
  
But the justices of the appellate court unanimously affirmed the judgment of the lower court and dismissed Apai’s case.  
  
While being led in evidence by the prosecution on January 7, 2020, the complainant gave a harrowing account of how she was violently attacked and raped by Apai, who was her mother’s driver.  
  
“My mother is a businesswoman; he (Apai) usually drives my father when my mother is not present, and he takes my younger brother and me to school,” she explained.  
  
The complainant said on the day of the incident she was at home alone because her parents had taken her younger brother, who fell ill around 3am that morning, to a hospital.  
  
She told the court that while she was preparing a meal in the kitchen, the driver approached her with a knife and threatened to harm her if she refused to accede to his sexual demand.  
  
She said when she resisted, the driver dragged her to a bedroom in her home where he punched and raped her.  
  
The victim told the court that she ran out of the house stark naked to escape her attacker.  
  
“When I ran out naked, my neighbour downstairs saw me and asked me to come into her house, but I refused because Francis (Apai) was with a knife and I was scared that he might come into the house and attack me.”  
  
“I ran across the street to another neighbour, with blood streaming down my legs, and they gave me a wrapper to cover myself up. My neighbours took me to the police station and the hospital, “she added.  
  
Child sexual abuse in Nigeria is an offence under several sections of the country’s criminal code. The age of consent is 18.  
  
The United Nations Children’s Emergency Fund says six out of every 10 children in Nigeria experience emotional, physical, or sexual abuse before the age of 18, with half experiencing physical violence.  
  
It added that of all the children who reported violence, less than five out of 100 received support.  
  
United Nations  
  
A United Nations statistical report compiled from government sources showed that more than 250,000 cases of rape or attempted rape were recorded by police annually.  
  
The reported data covered 65 countries.  
  
In a survey by the UN of 100 women that had suffered sexual violence in their lifetimes, 14% had experienced attempted rape while 2.3% had experienced rape.  
  
According to a survey by Positive Action for Treatment Access, over 31.4 percent of girls said their first sexual encounters were rape or forced sex of some kind.  
  
Data by the Cece Yara Foundation, a child advocacy organisation, revealed that 70.5 per cent of victimised girls experienced multiple incidents of sexual abuse, while 69.2% of victimised boys experienced multiple incidents of sexual abuse. 4.2% of girls who experienced childhood sexual abuse received help.  
  
The Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development reported that 1,200 girls had been raped in 2012 in Rivers, a coastal state in southeastern Nigeria.  
  
A one-year survey conducted at the Enugu State University Teaching Hospital between 2012 and 2013 revealed that 70% of sexual assault victims were under the age of 18.  
  
Conditions that increase the risk of girl-child sexual assault in Nigeria can be found in schools, baby factories, and the practise of child labour.  
  
Studies conducted in Nigeria disclose that young girls are the victims in most reported assault cases in hospitals.  
  
Statistics on rape and other sexual assaults are commonly available in industrialised countries and have become better documented throughout the world.  
  
Inconsistent definitions of rape, different rates of reporting, recording, prosecution, and conviction for rape create controversial statistical disparities and lead to accusations that many rape statistics are unreliable or misleading.  
  
In the Enugu survey, the majority of the victims knew their perpetrators, and the assault occurred inside uncompleted buildings and the victims’ or perpetrators’ residences.  
  
Speaking on the way out, a representative of the International Federation of Women Lawyers, Mrs. Philomena Nneji, said the increasing rate of domestic violence in Nigeria was psychologically devastating and worrisome.  
  
She noted that domestic workers were one of the major perpetrators.  
  
She said it was disheartening because most homes relied on domestic help to keep up with the home front while trying to make ends meet through their careers or businesses.  
  
According to Nneji, there is no doubt that women and children are among the most vulnerable members of society and require extra care. Now that CCTV seems not to be a way out, parental care must not be whittled down.  
  
She advised that parents should be proactively responsive instead of reactive, live up to their responsibilities to care for their children, and plan better towards that.  
  
Nneji said, “There is an urgent need to take action and teach children about what I refer to as abusive touch at a very early age of two years old and tell them that everyone is a suspect.”  
  
“Children should be fully enlightened and equipped against this social menace. Taekwondo should be introduced into the school curriculum; it teaches them how to be very defensive and open up to their parents at the right time. Parents should make their children their best friends and teach them sex education without any reservations.  
  
Incestual rape  
  
“Incestual rape is very rampant now because parents are passive and are not talking enough. The interests of the children should be paramount at all times.  
  
“On the other hand, there is a need for effective implementation of the relevant laws in this regard.”  
  
She said following up cases to logical conclusions of sentencing would act as a deterrent to others, adding that there should be no compromise in such cases.”  
  
A parent, who spoke to The PUNCH, on condition of anonymity, said, the unpleasant reality of the appalling issue of rape in our society could not be over emphasised.  
  
He stated, “If the government truly wishes to address the pandemic of sexual violence, we’ll have to contend with these facts and change course. This is because, many women find that attitudes and misconceptions about rape result in the victim being blamed for the crime.  
  
“Yes, friends, family, police, doctors, judges, and—those who should be helping the victim, often share misconceptions and hurt the victim nearly as deeply as did the rapist.  
  
“Also, the lackluster response of justice administrators and absence of institutional supportive system to help the victims is worrisome. More worrying is that a good number of suspected rapists move freely on the streets after committing the heinous act.”  
  
Another parent simply identified as Ijeoma, said, “As a parent, whenever I hear about the incessant cases of rape in society, it gets me thinking about the safety of my teenagers. I always pray that no child should experience such fate but you cannot keep them from going out so I talk to them to be conscious of people they meet outside.”