Sad tales of rape victims still left to lick their tears

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After being subjected to the harrowing experience of rape, victims are not getting enough support to erase the sad memories from their minds, DEJI LAMBO writes  
  
On Friday, November 23, 2018, about 9pm, 13-year-old Chika (pseudonym), while on her way back after she had seen off a friend, who had visited her at her parent’s house in the Bariga area of Lagos State, had an encounter with two daredevil cultists.  
  
This encounter, however, twisted her destiny and left her grappling with psychological torment that had yet to heal.  
  
According to her, a woman, who appeared to be finding it difficult carrying a young girl, begged her to help her buy a sachet of milk at a nearby shop on her way home.  
  
The minor said, “The woman spoke pitifully and gave me N1,000 for the milk. After purchasing it, the shop owner, Chinonso, while sorting my balance, suddenly accused me of spending a fake currency. Without arguing, I quickly pointed in the direction of the woman, but surprisingly, she had disappeared.”  
  
The Abia State indigene was dumbfounded as she stood in front of Chinonso’s shop, which was powered by a generator. The light radiating from his shop was the only visible light around the Odo-Eran Market, in Bariga, where the incident happened.  
  
Everywhere else was dark due to power outage and traders were said to have closed early in fear of reprisals by cultists, who had reportedly killed someone during a clash in the area.  
  
“Everything happened so fast,” she said as she blamed herself for the momentary slack in judgment that had eroded her desire to help people. But the shop owner, after listening to Chika, returned the money, collected his milk and cautioned her.  
  
The situation, however, took another dimension when one Dayo Maker, who sat beside Chinonso’s shop, created problem on the matter, drawing the attention of one Kazeem Bello aka AK to the incident. Both of them rebuked Chika and ignored Chinonso’s plea to set her free. Unknown to Chinonso, the fuzz by Dayo and Kazeem was a ploy to advance a clandestine agenda.  
  
Chika said she was later dragged into an uncompleted building opposite the Odo-Eran Market, where Kazeem and Dayo allegedly had carnal knowledge of her.  
  
The minor said, “Kazeem and Dayo dragged me into a very rough room in the uncompleted building and locked the gate, preventing anyone from gaining entry. I saw a bed and a fan in the room, but immediately Kazeem said both of them must have sex with me if I didn’t want to be ridiculed for spending a fake currency, I started crying.  
  
“I shouted and pleaded but I was overpowered, pinned down to the bed where Kazeem had sex with me, deflowering me in the process. After he was done, Dayo became hesitant, but Kazeem shouted at him saying, ‘you have to do it because we both planned it,’ and that was how I knew it was all planned from the point of the fake currency the woman gave me.”  
  
Crying profusely as she left the uncompleted building, Chika went home and narrated the harrowing experience to her mother who had been bothered about her whereabouts.  
  
The minor, however, said the stigma of being raped and the fear of Kazeem and Dayo, being dreaded cultists in the area gripped her mother, a petty trader, who ensured that the secret was contained within the family. So, the case was not reported and Chika’s hope of getting justice was buried despite being haunted by flashbacks from the tragic episode.  
  
Moving on, experience failed the minor in understanding the changes in her body as she misconceived her steadily bloating tummy to mean growth. But something strange kept her worried, “I have not seen my period in four months,” she muttered confusingly to a doctor immunising her and her colleagues in school.  
  
The 13-year-old said, “After the doctor’s advice, my mum took me to a nurse for a test, but as she confirmed that I was pregnant, I cried bitterly. We opted for an abortion but later kept the baby. This decision affected my studies and freedom because I had to stay indoors so people would not know that I was pregnant.  
  
“I spent five months indoors until I was delivered of a baby. During this period, I jostled between our room, parlour, the passage and bathroom. When everyone was out and I was tired of sleeping, I would sit at the passage and from a distance, observe people going about their businesses through the entrance at the passage. I never stepped outside. I never went for antenatal because there was no money.  
  
“When I was in labour at midnight, I never knew it was because I wanted to give birth. I started feeling a sudden pain in my stomach and alerted my mum, but it was late, and there was no car to take me to hospital. I went through the pain till daybreak when my mum and sisters rushed me to a local-delivery centre where I gave birth to my baby, Godswill. Sincerely, I don’t know the actual father of my son between Kazeem and Dayo, but I don’t pray to see them again.”  
  
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No doubt, Godswill’s fate of knowing his rightful father remains bleak giving the circumstances surrounding his birth. According to reports, Dayo had been remanded in prison, Kazeem, whom Chika’s younger sister, Blessing (pseudonym) had also accused of defiling her on Thursday, July 14, 2019, had disappeared and never resurfaced, but when Chika was asked what she would tell her son if he demanded to know his father, the mother of one remained speechless.  
  
Raped on campus, in broad daylight  
  
Oreoluwa (not real name) was on a visit to the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, in the Yaba Local Council Development Area of Lagos State, when she was reportedly defiled by four men, two of them undergraduates, on Saturday, June 29, 2019.  
  
The 15-year-old was said to be in the school to see a close relative when she was accosted by the suspects; Segun, Kolawole and Ezegbue; who took her to an office in the Student Union Government building of the school, where the crime was perpetrated.  
  
“When I refused to follow them, Segun threatened to stab me with a knife, so, I became very scared and followed them. While inside Philip’s office, I tried to stop Segun from molesting me but he threatened to kill me. I even told him I was menstruating, but he penetrated me regardless of that.  
  
“I thought it was over when Segun was done, but others came in one after the other. Ezegbue had sex with me but when it was Kolawole’s turn, he saw blood around my private parts and knew I was tired, so he told me to give him oral sex, which I did. When it was Philip’s turn, I pleaded with him and he said he wasn’t there to have sex with me, but said that I should lie to the others that he had sex with me if they asked,” the minor said.  
  
Haunted by the tragedy that befell her, Oreoluwa refused to go home as she lurked within the school’s premises trying to make sense of the whole incident. “The thought coming to my mind was to kill myself, I was just thinking of death,” she said.  
  
At home, Oreoluwa’s uncle, Olanrewaju, while looking for her, informed the police of her disappearance, and also invited the victim’s mother to join the search party for her but after frantic efforts to locate her, Olanrewaju found her sleeping on a bench in one of the school’s buildings.  
  
The minor upon sighting her mother tearfully told her the shocking news, and the police were informed and the perpetrators except Segun, who had been on the run, were arrested and charged.  
  
But at home, Oreoluwa had sleepless nights and attempted to commit suicide.  
  
She said, “I entered into the kitchen, took a knife, but my uncle’s wife, who also came into the kitchen during that moment saw me with it and quickly called my uncle who stopped me from using the knife to hurt myself. As he stopped me, both of us started crying and my uncle said I should not give up because he would never neglect me.”  
  
When our correspondent visited the institution, the Provost, FCE (T), Akoka, Dr Wahab Azeez, said, “We cannot cover up any culprit, who has violated the law. Although the college has its administrative way of dealing with such issues, this case is criminal and it is the court that can pronounce whether one is guilty or not.”  
  
Rising rape cases  
  
Although many believe that most rape incidents go unreported in Nigeria because of stigmatisation and the fact that the wheel of justice turns slowly, there is a widespread belief that rape cases are on the rise in Nigeria. 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.  
  
The study also says that 70 per cent of these numbers had experienced more than one incident of sexual assault. In 2013, the Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development, an NGO, reported that in 2012, about 1,200 girls were raped in Rivers State.  
  
Statistics obtained from a Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Mirabel Centre also showed that 4,947 victims were sexually violated between July 2013 – October 2019 mostly in Lagos State. But 3,758 of the 4,947 were defiled victims; more so, from July to December 2013, 115 victims within the age bracket 0-17 were sexually violated. In the same terrain, 264 victims were sexually abused in 2014; in 2015, 476 victims; in 2016, 796 victims; in 2017, 819 victims; in 2018, 849 victims, while 678 victims within the same age bracket were sexually violated within January to October 2019.  
  
Inferences drawn from these statistics showed that there is an upsurge in defilement cases in the country. Every week the print and electronic media, churn out contents that chronicle this gruesome act on hapless and vulnerable victims.  
  
Earlier in the year, a Supervisor in Chrisland School, Adegboyega Adenekan, who defiled two-year-old Paulina (pseudonym) on the school’s premises was sentenced to 60 years imprisonment, without an option of fine, by Justice Sybil Nwaka, of the Lagos State Special Offences Court.  
  
Nwaka, while delivering her judgment had said that “The victim, in her evidence before the court, said Mr Adenekan put his mouth and his hand in her wee-wee (private parts). She also said that the supervisor put his mouth in the private parts of her best friend (name withheld).  
  
“The little girl said Adenekan covered her mouth when she attempted to shout and that he defiled her twice on the school premises, at his office and the hallway. I have no doubt in my mind that this defendant, Adenekan, is the same person the victim said put his hand in her private parts and therefore, the defendant is convicted accordingly and sentenced to 60 years’ imprisonment.”  
  
In another development, one Terna Taga, 18, was nabbed for allegedly defiling and impregnating an internally displaced person, Aisha (pseudonym), 10, in Benue State.  
  
The state Police Public Relations Officer, Catherine Anene, who confirmed Taga’s arrest on Tuesday, August 6, 2019, said Aisha ran away from home after she got the information that her guardian wanted to marry her out to an elderly man to cover the shame of being pregnant out of wedlock.  
  
According to reports, good Samaritans who found Aisha where she was dumped took her to the Foundation Memorial Hospital where she gave birth through a caesarean section.  
  
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Also, on July 4, 2018, five male teachers of the Polytechnic Staff School, Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic, Birnin-Kebbi, Kebbi State, were dismissed for allegedly impregnating a Senior Secondary School 3 female pupil, Hadija (pseudonym). The school’s Vice-Principal, Oumar Woulandakoye, was said to have confirmed the incident.  
  
Recently, 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 on Thursday, December 19, 2019, 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.  
  
Also, a principal, Samson Adeyemo, 30, was arrested for allegedly defiling twin sisters, 17, and impregnated one of them at Beckley Estate, in the Abule-Egba area of Lagos State.  
  
“He continued having sex with me until I became pregnant,” one of the victims said, adding that, “when my mother confronted me with a slap about the pregnancy, I told her it was the principal,” the victim said.  
  
Adeyemo had been standing trial in court for the crime.  
  
Drugs, pornography and family  
  
Dr Valentine Ezeh of the Psychological Department of the University of Nigeria, attributed the growing scourge of defilement to drug and alcohol abuse, easy access to pornographic content and the promotion of nudity via the entertainment and advertising industry, among others, all of which trigger the cognitive drive that makes people sexually aroused and necessitate them to pounce on defenceless minors as hosts to quench their sexual desires.  
  
He said, “80 per cent of the perpetrators of defilement is known by the family of the victims and only 20 per cent are the people that defiled the victims on their way. The crime is caused by a high sexual drive and what makes people experience high sexual drive is drug and alcohol abuse, the entertainment industry, pornography films which can be easily accessed, and advertisement which has through the concept of body objectification, turned women’s bodies into objects for men’s desires as the women have also inculcated that by working hard on their body to be a better object for men.  
  
“All these build up a sexual drive inside someone and when the drive is built up, it motivates the behaviour to quench the drive. So, in a situation when you don’t have self-control, and because it is not easy to get someone to quench your sex drive immediately it arouses, whilst the drive gets high beyond self-control in the case of someone with a low self-regulation, the only option is to use minors who are helpless to quench the drive.  
  
“And somebody who has experienced something as traumatic as defilement can have recurrent thoughts because when you are asleep, the memory slows down, so the thought of the traumatic event can slip into the life memory and the person will start seeing it as a nightmare. Once that happens, the person will start isolating herself, stop interacting with men because the person will through the concept of generalization start thinking that all men are the same.. Such person should be referred to a psychiatric.”  
  
Also, a Professor of Child Psychology, University of Lagos, Ibinabo Agiobu-Kemmer, noted that carelessness on the part of the parent/guardians and ritual purposes were also part of the reasons for the increased defilement.  
  
“Some perpetrators defile girl minors for money-making rituals. They claim that they find it difficult to get virgins among older females in today’s society as required of them by their herbalists. Also, carelessness and irresponsible parenting on the home front by mothers, especially in cases of incest, is a factor,” she said.  
  
Double jeopardy  
  
In Nigeria, there are laws promulgated to curb sexual abuse/defilement, the Article 16 of the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child, affirmed that “Children should be protected from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatments and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse. More accurately, Article 27 of the same charter, stressed that “Children should be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.”  
  
In the Nigerian context, the provisions of the Child Right Act 2003 forbid “unlawful sexual intercourse with a child, etc,” and also officially prohibit all “forms of sexual abuse and molestation,” on a child. Also, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, enacted by the National Assembly in 2015, upholds that a person convicted of rape “is liable to imprisonment for life,” among other established laws at the federal level and in various states.  
  
However, the judiciary in Nigeria is stretched and justice for victims often takes longer to arrive. In addition to this, there are few effective state-sponsored bodies or programmes that provide support and help for rape victims to handle the aftermath of rape.  
  
Before Oreoluwa was rescued from committing suicide, Olanrewaju and his spouse had dedicated time to monitor her. But when the flashback of the trauma was negatively influencing Oreoluwa’s behaviour despite going for counselling, Olanrewaju said he had to relocate her to another place.  
  
The 37-year-old said, “Oreoluwa could not sleep. She always watched television at midnight because of the flashback of what happened. I also discovered that she had a jotter where she wrote all that happened, the regret, the stigma; how she now has hatred for boys and can never forgive those who defiled her, and how she could get justice.  
  
“So, I dedicated more time discussing with her to encourage her. But when I relocated her to another area, where she could mix with her mates, her condition started improving.”  
  
As for Chika’s mother, Rita, whose two daughters were defiled by a fleeing suspect, Kazeem, she said a change of location was not the best option “because I don’t have money to park out of this environment and I could not take them, most especially Chika, to another place to live because I was ashamed of her condition and had to hide it from everyone including her brother.  
  
“But somehow, he got to know and ensured that Dayo was arrested while Kazeem escaped. Chika is supposed to be in school, but now focuses on taking care of her baby. I never planned it to be like this, so, I can’t be happy. Both of them used to think a lot, at times, Chika will be lost in her thought and all of a sudden, snap out and start cursing Dayo and Kazeem. But I have been encouraging her,” the mother of five said during our correspondent’s visit to her house in Bariga.  
  
In a study she conducted in 2019, on ‘Child Rape in Nigeria, Implications on the Education of the Child,’ one Maria Agbo stated. “The police demand bribes from rape victims in order to investigate rape cases and give reports, and when the bribes are not given to them, they accuse the rape victims of consenting to the sexual intercourse with the rapists. In some cases, the complainant becomes the accused and vice versa, depending on who gives the highest bribe.”  
  
Chika’s brother, Jude, who usually takes her to the court during court proceedings says the family’s experience with the police has been negative. He accused the investigating police officer of extortion.  
  
He said, “Despite what my sister went through, the inspector handling our case told me that we should bring a lot of money when we were coming to court. I gave her N7,000 on our first visit but she has been asking for more money.  
  
“She said the money is for registration, photocopy and to feed the prisoner, Dayo, as if he is my family. The annoying part is that the inspector is also using the same tactics to collect money from the detainee’s family.”  
  
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