Unending trauma: Rape victims recount heartrending encounters at childhood (2)

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In this concluding part of the write-up on the plights of rape victims, NAOMI CHIMA identifies causes of sexual violence and how it can be stopped  
  
“I advise parents to stop keeping issues of this nature to themselves. I have seen a lot of situations where the parents say the perpetrator is their uncle or relative, so they keep the issue to the family.  
  
“If they report these people and they are charged, if they ever manage to come of it, they will serve as deterrents to others like them and they will not even dare to do such again.  
  
“I usually tell them that I will detain them for compromising to divert the course of justice. They would collect money from the defendant’s side and they will keep screaming that they no longer want a court case, some will not even attend to court summons, and if there is no witness in court, there won’t be any judgment.  
  
“My interest is to protect the interest of the child to any length, and nothing else, and thank God for Lagos State not smiling at cases of this sort.”  
  
He also advised that the government should endeavour to take up the case immediately after it is reported, stating that the case should not be allowed to go beyond three months to enable the victim to discard the bad memories.  
  
“To the government, we (prosecutors) advise that whenever we find someone wanting in this offence or offences, they, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions especially, should please file the case in time to the high court.  
  
“Most of the time, they will bring advice that the person has a case to answer but it will take a longer time before they will file the case to the High Court. This delay causes more psychological damage to the victim,” he added.  
  
He also suggested that the government should employ more judges to sit on such cases to expedite the judgments.  
  
“Maybe, it’s because we have very few justices who are handling or are specialised in these special offences cases. So, if they don’t have more hands at the High Court, they should employ more. By the time these perpetrators get to know that about three people get sentenced every two weeks or every week, it will scare them from such acts because they will have the news of the sentences fresh in their memories.  
  
“You know when prosecuting these perpetrators takes a long time and judgment is delayed, it also passes a message to these offenders too,” he added.  
  
‘Sex education undermines societal values’  
  
The former Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, on November 3, 2022, said he believed sex education should not be taught in schools. He expressed that there were other ways through which children could learn about it, including from their peers, but that teaching sex education in schools would undermine the moral fiber of our society.  
  
He stated that all available evidence indicated that sex education in schools does more harm than good to the students, hence he directed the Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council to quickly review the curriculum and expunge any sexual education content in the curriculum used in schools in Nigeria.  
  
However, a school teacher, Mrs Munachi Osaretin, disclosed that teaching sex education to pupils and students was a good thing to do.  
  
“The fight against child sexual violation concerns the school a lot. Yes, charity begins at home but doesn’t end there, it goes beyond the home.  
  
“Most children stay seven to eight hours in school per day, how many hours do they have to spend with their parents at home? And you know what we teachers teach these children to stay permanently in their brains. There are some things the parents won’t want to say but the teacher would. The teacher will bisect the whole thing to them; the trauma and the consequences in various ways that it will sink deeper into them than when some parents tell it to them.”  
  
Doctor blames separation, divorce for child sexual violence  
  
A Consultant Neuropsychiatrist at Havana Specialist Hospital and Critical Care Unit, Lagos State University Teaching Hospital, Oparaugo Udebiuwa, who spoke to our correspondent stated that these abuses were common in one-parent homes, adding that these abusers are increasing in number because the number of abused people was also increasing.  
  
“Not having a father figure in the house is a common reason why this act still thrives in our society. These violations mostly happen in a one-parent home, due to divorce or separation. And especially in a situation where the adults are still young, there is a propensity for them to get involved in other relationships and unfortunately, they might not end up with the right people of a good character.”  
  
Speaking on the effects of abuse on victims, he said, “A lot of the victims develop all kinds of emotional and psychological illnesses. Some of them get depressed and irritable, some end up having personality disorders such as anti-social personality disorders while some of them get into drugs and substance abuse and are in and out of correctional facilities because of all that.  
  
“Socially, some of them end up as thieves and armed robbers because their mental life is damaged and they want to get back at society. It’s like a vicious circle, a lot of abusers end up being abusers themselves.”  
  
What to do  
  
Udebiuwa advised that having a paternal figure in the house, and educating and enrolling victims for regular therapy are some of the safest solutions for victims.  
  
“Some situations are controllable, having a paternal figure in the home is important. It will bridge a lot in some homes.  
  
“Also, education is important. Getting awareness of how safe an environment should be to avoid all that, especially for these children, paying attention to friends and neighbours you welcome into the homes is important.  
  
“I also think sex education for children to a certain extent is not a bad idea, making them aware of the dangers they are to avoid during adolescence age, which is a good time to start teaching sex education to children. At this age, it will not be prevented but the awareness will be there and they will know the areas that are a No No, and know when to come to report to their parents.  
  
“However, for victims, especially the ones who are psychologically affected and have developed trust issues, long-term social therapy, a lot of support, analytical therapy is advised.”  
  
Causes of consistent rape cases  
  
A senior psychologist with the Remz Institute, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Usen Essien, noted that when a child is defiled by adults who are meant to protect them, it makes them lose trust in society.  
  
“The aim for every parent is to raise a wholesome and complete child. But, when a child is raped, that process is cut short. The child’s development is altered. It will take a concerted effort from parents and the rest of society to rehabilitate them, putting them right back on the path of development.”  
  
He also advised that parents should look out for signs to show if their kids are being molested by anyone.  
  
“Parents must pay attention to their children’s said and unsaid words. Your children should trust you enough to tell you when someone is giving them the bad talk,” he added.  
  
He also stated that the breakdown in society may be responsible for the upsurge in the cases of teenage rape cases around the country.  
  
This is as he added that most adults are walking around with mental health issues, adding that they would need treatment to get better.  
  
“Some adults who defile these children are, most times, not mentally sound. No mentally stable man will sexually see a child. It is that pervasive nature in their mind that needs checking and treatment from certified professionals,” he added.  
  
According to a healthcare professional with Green Spring Wellness and Maternity, Nnaemeka Iwunze, rape is on the rise because of a lack of proper enlightenment, neglect of the parents, and victimisation of the victim by society.  
  
“I feel the men are drawn to these young girls who begin to develop physically into fully fledged females. These rapists find it hard to take their obsessed eyes off the children, especially in areas where families share bathrooms, kitchens, and the same passage, like a public compound. These rapists, who though grew up to see when these girls were born, are surprised to see them sexually mature. So, they cannot deal with noticing the developing features with their eyes alone but thus want to taste too. So, the parents have a lot to do for their children especially those between ages six and 18.  
  
‘I also think this crime is mostly around rural areas, because of lack of proper information. People in the cities who are exposed to formal education rarely don’t speak out.  
  
“We have not got there yet, we need more enlightenment so that children and teenagers are subtly made conscious of this societal ill. In that way, they are better equipped to evade present and future predator uncles, family friends and caregivers,” he added.  
  
Data on rape in Nigeria  
  
According to the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency, a total of 5,624 Sexual Gender Based Violence cases were received between August 2022 and July 2023.  
  
In September 2023, the Executive Secretary, DSVA, Titilola Vivour-Adeniyi, representing Titilayo Shitta-Bey, the Solicitor-general and Permanent Secretary, of Lagos State Ministry of Justice, stated that 45 per cent of the survivors were boys and 55 per cent were children.  
  
She said that of the 5,624 cases recorded, 143 were of child abuse, and physical assault; 235 were defilement cases, three were of defilement/molestation by minor to minor; and 33 cases were sexual harassment/molestation.  
  
In Nigeria, more than 700 cases of sexual assault were reported between January and May 2020, according to data from Nigeria’s National Anti-trafficking Agency.  
  
During the lockdown in 2020, the Nigeria Police said they recorded 717 incidents between January and May. In April 2020, the then Nigeria’s Minister of Women Affairs, Pauline Tallen, said at least 3,600 cases of rape were recorded, while the National Human Rights Commission received 11,200 reported cases of rape over the whole year.  
  
According to the report, sexual violence starts early while one in three female rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11 and 17 years old, and one in eight reported that it occurred before age 10. Nearly one in four male rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11 and 17 years old and about one in four reported that it occurred before age 10.  
  
The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund data stated that one in four Nigerian girls is sexually assaulted before the age of 18.  
  
Also, according to data from Nigeria’s national anti-trafficking agency, Nigeria, a country of 206 million people, had just 32 rape convictions between 2019 and 2020.  
  
WARIF Centre in 2018 indicated that over 1,100 girls in less than three years had been attended to at the WARIF Centre, of which 759, accounted for 69 per cent with minors between the ages of 0 and18 years old.  
  
A study by the National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in 2016 showed that nearly one in five women and one in 38 men had experienced completed or attempted rape, and one in 14 men were made to penetrate someone, completed or attempted during his lifetime.  
  
According to the National Institute of Health, the National Institutes of Health’s National Library of Medicine reported that 312 minors, under the age of 18, were sexually violated in Nigeria, with 135 of them under 10 years of age and 204 above 18. Four hundred and eighty-eight of the victims were provided with medical treatment between the stated periods of April 2014 and June 2016 and 308 Forensic Medical Reports were forwarded to the Nigeria Police Force.  
  
Findings from the National Survey carried out in 2014 on Violence Against Children in Nigeria confirmed one in four females reported experiencing sexual violence in childhood with approximately 70 per cent reporting more than one incident of sexual violence. In the same study, it was found that 24.8 per cent of females ages 18 to 24 years experienced sexual abuse before age 18 of which 5.0 per cent sought help, with only 3.5 per cent receiving any services. The report stated that 40 cases were charged to court of which five cases were discharged, seven cases were at the prosecution stage, 27 cases awaiting trial, and one perpetrator was prosecuted and imprisoned for 14 years, following trial.