

UNDERGRADUATES PERCEPTION ON CAUSAL FACTORS OF RAPE AND REASONS FOR CULTURE OF SILENCE ASSOCIATED WITH RAPE VICTIMS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The prevalence and consequences of rape in Universities calls for urgent scholarly and global attention. The phenomenon of rape has been caused by several factors and aggravated by the culture of silence due to the sensitive nature of the act and stigma associated with it. While neglecting this fact, several studies have focused on the pattern and consequences of rape in the Nigeria. This study thus focused on the perceived causal factors of rape and culture of silence among undergraduates of the University of Ibadan. The differential association theory and Social bond/control theories were used as frameworks for explanation. Data were collected through quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample size of 499 respondents for the survey was determined using Leslie Kish's formula, while 4 case studies, 5 in-depth interviews (IDI) and one of key informant interview (KII) with a criminologist was carried out for the qualitative. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented using descriptive statistics such as percentages, charts and cross-tabulations, while the qualitative data was content analyzed. Findings from the study showed that all the respondents have heard of rape before. About (62.7%) emphasized 'indecent dressing' as a major factor for being raped while a large majority (88.6%) identified 'crave for sexual fantasies' as the most critical factor responsible for rape to occur. About (89.2%) agreed that rape leads to stigmatization hence victims keep quiet about it. Many perpetrators of rape were said to have continued in the act because they were never apprehended and punished due to the fact that victims were silent about it to avoid the disgrace and stigma associated with being raped. The culture of silence aggravates the prevalence of rape, hence sectors such as the family, religion, government, legal, economic, mass media and educational need to speak up and encourage rape victims to voice out and seek redress so that offenders can be punished. This will go a long way to reduce the prevalence of rape in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Culture of silence, Perceived Causal factors, Tertiary Institutions, Rape victims

Introduction

Rape, is the act of having an unlawful carnal knowledge or forceful sexual intercourse upon another person without their consent or against their will. Rape traditionally, has been treated as a heinous crime with no culture sanctioning its societal occurrences. There have been severe penalties visited upon offenders across cultures and religious backgrounds, thus making rape along with murder and kidnapping the most serious of common law offences.

Rape is a form of sexual violence otherwise classified as gender-based violence. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2004) defines sexual violence as any sexual act or an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments, or advances, acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. WHO further reported that violence against women and girls is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world (WHO, 2004). According to Joda et al (2007), domestic violence, rape (forced sex), physical abuse such as wife battering, verbal abuse, incest, female genital cutting (FGC), denial of food, denial of time for relaxation, forced marriage, child marriage and other sexual assault are the forms of violence most frequently experienced by women. Of all the sexual violence outlined, rape is however the focus of this study.

Rape as a form of violence against women occurs in several different contexts such as date rape, stranger rape, marital rape or statutory rape among others. In all these, there is always a perpetrator and a victim. Unfortunately, despite the increasing awareness of women's rights, and advocacy for the protection of the girl child and women in many parts of the world, rape as a form of sexual violence, still persists in Nigeria and other nations.

With regard to causal factors of rape perpetration and victimization Some scholars classified these factors into: those that Increase the risk of one being raped, those that increase the risk of an individual perpetuating rape, and those within the social environment –including peers and family – influencing the likelihood of rape and the reaction to it (world report). The various factors have an additive effect, such that the more factors present, the greater the likelihood of sexual violence. Most of the adjoining causal factors of rape are related to the attitude and behavior of the perpetrator and the victim as well as the social structures and conditions that make the “act” permissible (Ani, Taiwo, and Isiugo-Abanihe 2019).The role of modernizing influences like social media and pornography viewing; indecent dressing, nature of physical environment, alcohol and drug consumption, peer influence, culture among others cannot be overemphasized.

There seems to be a culture of silence surrounding rape in Nigeria (Achunike & Kitause 2014). One of the reasons why it is so difficult to collect much data about rape is that most of the rape cases do not reach the medical or legal sectors (Baumer, Felson & Messner, 2003). The social stigma associated with rape forces female victims in Nigeria to conceal rape assaults in order to save themselves from shame and public embarrassment. Even parents of victims often find it difficult to come out publicly to report such cases (Achunike & Kitause 2014). According to Okeke (2007), typical Nigerian parents go to extreme lengths to protect the public image of their daughters, especially as regards to rape. In some cases, culture of silence may be necessitated by the quest of the victim's family to maintain the ever existing cordial relationship with the parents of the perpetrator of the heinous crime (Achunike & Kitause 2014). Onyejekwe (2008), asserted that the culture of silence with rape victimization is increasing partly because of humiliation and intimidation of victims by the police, and embarrassment due to public knowledge. Hutton et al (2006) aptly describe this situation to include being ostracized by those who consider rape as bringing dishonor, to a woman's family and community. This culture of silence reinforces the stigma already attached to the victim rather than to the perpetrator, as the dominant perception is that women have generally provoked the abuser to attack. There are also cases where women are unable to obtain a medical examination to substantiate their report; or they simply do not know how to report rape and obtain help (Amnesty International, 2006). Furthermore, the poor societal reaction in forms of prosecution of perpetrators of rape issues among blacks particularly in Africa, has also contributed to the culture of silence. For instance, Kalra and Bhugra (2013), frowned that only rape cases against white women were prosecuted in South Africa during the apartheid system while sexual violence against black women were considered an acceptable part of life.

It is against the backdrop of above background and problems of rise in the incidence of rape in the university campuses that this study was undertaken at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria to ascertain the perceptions of undergraduates of the institution on:

- (a) Factors responsible for being raped and committing rape
- (b) Reasons for the culture of silence associated with rape victims

Materials and Methods

The study was located at University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The University of Ibadan was established in November 17, 1948 as an independent external college of the University of London, which was then called University College Ibadan. Currently, the University is made up of thirteen (13) faculties. The cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were combined (triangulation of

instruments). Primary data was obtained with the use of questionnaires, in-depth interviews, key informant interview and case studies.

For the quantitative methods, the questionnaire was utilized while adopting the multi-stage sampling technique in the selection of respondents for the survey. The first stage included the random selection of seven faculties out of the thirteen faculties in the University of Ibadan, using ballot paper. The second stage also involved the random selection of departments from each faculty, using lucky dip. Respondents were then selected using the stratified sampling based on the level of their study. This is to have a representative of each student from each level and availability. A total of 499 respondents (being the sample size determined using Leslie Kish (1965) formula for infinite population) were used for the quantitative aspect of data collection, while for the qualitative, five (5) in-depth interviews with non-victims of rape, four (4) case studies of rape victims and one (1) key informant interview with a criminologist was conducted.

Quantitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tool like tables, bar charts, pie charts, percentages, and frequency distributions with the use of statistical software called Statistical Package for The Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative data such were content analyzed using verbatim quotes.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration included voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, beneficence (maximum benefit) and non-maleficence (minimal risk). This study adhered strictly to these principles. Accordingly, all the information given in this study, were treated with confidentiality

Findings/Results

A total of 499 undergraduates of the University of Ibadan participated in the study. Their socio- demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Socio-Demographic Characteristics (N=499)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	249	49.9
Female	250	50.1
Age		
Below 21 years	220	44.1
21-25 years	220	44.1
26-30 years	31	6.2
31-36 years	26	5.2

Above 36 years	2	0.4
Marital Status		
Single	469	94.0
Cohabiting	11	2.2
Married	15	3.0
Dating	4	0.8
Level of Study		
100 level	112	22.4
200 level	114	22.8
300 level	92	18.4
400 level	92	18.4
500 level	89	17.8
Faculty		
The social sciences	97	19.4
Law	84	16.8
Sciences	50	10.0
Arts	67	13.4
Education	55	11.0
Pharmacy	90	18.0
College of medicine	56	11.2
Religion		
Christianity	431	86.4
Islam	68	13.6
Ethnic Group		
Igbo	128	25.7
Yoruba	311	62.3
Hausa	8	1.6
Edo	28	5.6
Itsekiri	5	1.0
Others	19	3.8

Source: Field Survey

Table 1 show that female students have a slightly higher proportion of 50.1%, than the male counterparts who were 49.9%. This suggests that the gap between the male and the female is being bridged by the contemporary campaign of gender equality and girl-child education. For the age, respondents for the study were aged ‘below 21 years’ to ‘above 36 years’. Results showed that those below 21 years and between 21-25 had a frequency of 220(44.1%) each, which was the highest percentage. This affirms the fact that most University undergraduate students are youths, and that younger people are being admitted into the tertiary institution. With reference to marital status, a large majority 469(94.0%) were single. This is not surprising considering the fact that most of the respondents were less than 20 and 21-25 years and that education is valued

more than marriage in South-west region of Nigeria. The distribution according to the respondents' level of study shows that 114(22.8%) were in 200 level, while 89(17.8%) were in 500 level. There were more of 200 level students and this is because direct entry students have increased the number of students in that level.

With regards to their faculty of study, 97(19.4%) were in the social sciences, 52(11.2%) were in College of Medicine. The differing percentages of students in these faculties show that some faculties have more students than others. Majority 431(86.4%) of the respondents were Christians, while 68(13.6%) were Muslims. This is also attributed to the fact that more Christian worship centers are being built in the south western region with increased efforts at evangelism and converts to Christianity. A greater number of the respondents 311(62.3%) were Yoruba, followed by the Igbo ethnic group which accounted for about 128(25.7%). The explanation for this could be due to the fact that the study area is largely dominated by the Yorubas' as it is located in the south-western region. The high frequency in other ethnic group explains that in a University setting, there are bound to be students who have converged from different ethnic backgrounds to study in such University.

Factors responsible for being raped and Committing Rape

The below table reveals the various causal factors of rape as indicated by the responses of students on factors responsible for being raped and committing rape. A large majority, about 90 percent of the respondents mentioned indecent dressing a major factor responsible for being a rape victim. Alcohol was also mentioned by a large majority (73.5 percent and 82.0 percent) as a major factor responsible for being raped and committing rape respectively. Another major factor for being raped that was reiterated by approximately 80 percent of the respondents was walking late at night, while 62.5 percent attributed being raped to factors such as regular visits to guys

Table 2: Factors responsible for being raped and Committing Rape (N=499)

Factors responsible for being raped	Frequency	%
Indecent dressing	444	89.0
Alcohol	367	73.5
Attending night parties	361	72.3
Walking late at night	395	79.2
Regular visit to guys	312	62.5
Factors responsible for committing rape		
Peer pressure	358	71.7
Alcohol and drug use	409	82.0

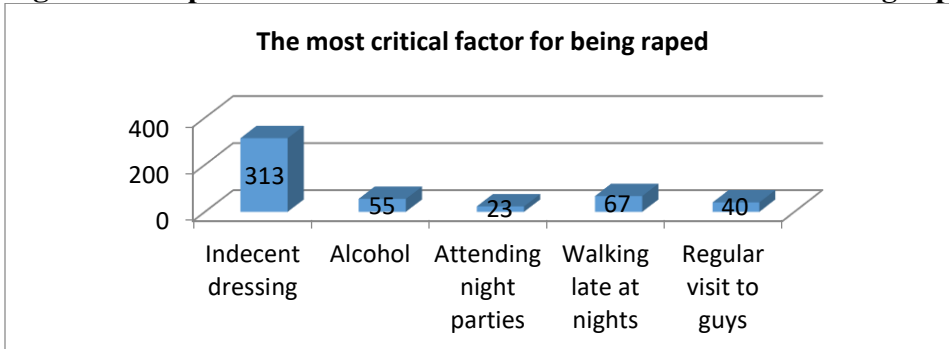
Poverty	118	23.6
Unemployment	178	35.7
Delinquent behavior	365	73.1
Crave for sexual fantasies	442	88.6
Exposure to sexual media	409	82.0
Pornography	434	87.0

Source: Field Survey

Over 80 percent of the respondents attributed the act of committing rape to factors such as alcohol and drug abuse, pornography; crave for sexual fantasies and exposure to social media, while delinquent behavior was stressed by 73.1%. Poverty and unemployment were the other factors reported by 23.5 and 35.7 percent respectively as being responsible for committing rape. The combination of factors such as indecent dressing and crave for sexual fantasies was reiterated by a victim of rape who reported in the case studies who documented thus:

Suddenly he parked by that deserted road and was touching my laps. I was on a mini skirt, my hair net and a slipper because I was sick and couldn't dress up properly. My laps are really fair and he just couldn't take his eyes off them. I didn't know he has been looking at me all through the road" Case study 4, female, 19yrs, 400level, European Studies

Figure 1: Respondents' views on the most critical factor for being raped



The above figure revealed that more than half 313(62.7%) respondents believed that indecent dressing is the most critical factor that can make an individual vulnerable to rape, 55(11%) of the respondents believed that alcohol is the highest causal factor for being raped, 23(4.6%) of the respondents asserted that attending night parties is the most critical factor, 67(13.4%) believed that walking late at night is more critical, while 40(8%) believed that regular visit to guys is the most critical.

This quantitative result is supported by qualitative analysis of an in-depth interview report which explains that young girls are influenced by the kind of dressing they watch on television;

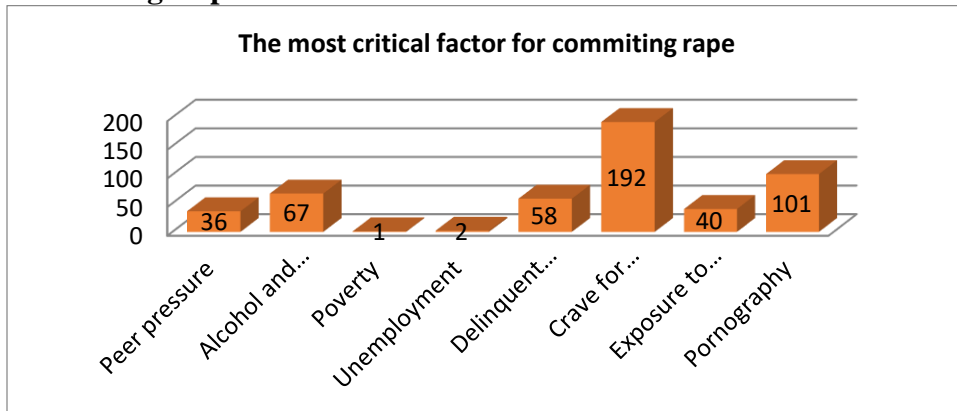
I think the number one on the list should be indecent dressing, most of our young girls are influenced by what they see on TV not minding that those are make believe scenes in a particular movie. When they see those crazy dressings, they end up coming out dressed as exactly as they've seen on TV, this is the biggest factor in terms of being raped (IDI/Male/21yrs/Law)

This result is also supported by the literature that there's likelihood that ladies who dress indecently or provocatively could be prone to sexual harassment and or rape (Omede, 2011).

The underpinning factor that reveals indecent dressing as the most critical factor for being raped is because women have sensitive parts and are often viewed as sex objects. It is important to note that men also dress indecently in sagging manners but are not sexually aroused by their female counterparts owing to the fact that men are not seen as sex objects. The patriarchal nature of our African society has immensely contributed to the view of women as sex objects meant for the men such that even when a little boy sees an indecently dressed woman, he drools at her.

Attending night parties are not seen as a huge causal factor that can cause rape because parties are done in places where there are lots of people and there is hardly a way an individual can resort to committing rape in such environment without being caught.

Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents on the most Critical Factor for committing Rape



The figure above revealed that 36(7.2%) respondents attributed peer pressure as the most critical factor that can make an individual to commit rape, 67(13.4%) believed that it is alcohol and drug use, only 1(0.2%) believed that poverty is the most critical, 3(0.6%) chose unemployment as the most critical factor, 58(11.6%) believed that delinquent behavior is the most critical, majority of the respondents with a frequency of 192(38.5%) believed that crave for sexual fantasies is the most critical factor in determining the causes of perpetrating rape, 40(8%) believed that exposure to sexual media is the most critical, lastly 101(20%) respondents believed that pornography is more critical than other factors in causing an individual to commit rape.

During the interview session, a respondent explained that factors such as alcohol and pornography can cause a man to commit rape, but he strongly claims self-esteem and crave for sexual fantasies as the highest perceived factors.

Alcohol and drug use, pornography, disorganized upbringing are other factors that can actually lead to rape but the percentage of these factors for me, is so low. Even when a man drinks to a certain stage of stupidity, I still think, any lady can easily send him off, forget the alcohol, he isn't strong enough, because he must be staggering, and the alcohol in his system would have weakened his muscles to a reasonable extent. So personally, I think it is low self-esteem and crave for sexual fantasies that are the major causal factors for rape
(IDI/MALE/21YRS/LAW)

Another respondent expressed his views showing that there is a correlation between peer pressure and crave for sexual gratification and this can push youth to be involved in rape either planned or unplanned.

Peer pressure in the sense that a guy who has friends with high sexual desire would feel intimidated and look for possible means of getting satisfaction through rape (IDI/Male/24yrs/Sociology)

The above reiterates the connection between peer pressure and rape particularly when the friends have characteristics of high sexual cravings or desire. This corroborates the general view that says show me your friends and I will show you who you are. The tendency of indulging in rape due to sexual desires drive which could be predisposed by peer influence or pressure is again expressed in the above narration.

Reasons for the Observed Culture of Silence Associated with Rape Victims

Table 3 below discusses the views of respondents on the experience of perception of stigmatization on victims of rape. It further highlights respondents' views on the ways and forms rape victims experience stigmatization. Findings shows that 445(89.2%) of the respondents agreed that experience of rape leads to an experience of stigmatization while 51(10.2%) reported that rape does not lead to stigmatization while 3(0.6%) did not respond to the question. This result supports the literature that victims of rape also suffer social victimization or stigmatization and loss of social confidence especially in cultures with strong customs and taboos regarding sex and sexuality (Campell & Raja 1999).

From the table above, 444(89%) of the respondents agree that victims often keep quiet when they are raped, while 51(10.2%) do not and 4(0.8%) did not respond. The table also reveals that (7.6%) of the respondents said that victims keep quiet because of rejection and threats, (43.1%) believe that victims keep quiet mostly because of stigmatization, (22.8%) believe that shame is another factor responsible for making victims keep quiet. Only (4%) of the respondents believe that victims voice out mainly because they need help of any sort.

Table 3: Respondents’ views on stigmatization and silence about rape (N=499)

Variables	Categories	Frequencies	%
Stigmatization of rape	Yes	445	89.2
	No	51	10.2
	No response	3	0.6
Rape victims often keep quiet about the incident when they are raped	Yes	444	89.0
	No	51	10.2
	No response	4	0.8
Reasons why they keep/not keep quiet about rape incidents	Rejection and threats	38	7.6
	Stigmatization	215	43.1
	They feel ashamed	114	22.8
	They need help	20	4.0
	No response	112	22.4

Source: Field Survey

A respondent during the interview narrated that the major reasons behind the culture of silence included shame and stigmatization she added that sometimes, family members also contribute to perpetrators of rape going unpunished through their silence or sweeping the issue of rape under the carpet to avoid stigmatization. She expressed thus:

Personally, I think most victims keep quiet because of shame and stigmatization and this makes them to bottle up everything inside of them instead of sharing with people. Even families tend to hide it because of the setting we are in, in Africa and Nigeria, when people know that one’s daughter is raped, they might not want to marry such girl. Some even think they might have contacted diseases when they were raped (IDI/ male/ 21years/law)

Another respondent reiterated that the culture of silence to the society we live, does not support the voicing out of rape by victims because of the experience of stigma and threats from the perpetrator. She expressed thus:

The society in which we live in, does not favor the report of rape. The victims are often embarrassed, sometimes the perpetrator often threatens whoever their victim is not to tell. In cases whereby the person who did the act is a relative or even one of the parents, the victim would have nobody to voice out to (IDI/Female/21yrs/religious studies)

The above response further buttresses the fact that victims of rape usually experience embarrassment and lack of understanding when they voice out reporting the incidence of being raped. This is not unusual particularly when the victim is considered a girlfriend or indecently dressed. The situation is mainly so in a patriarchal country like Nigeria that also lacks effective laws against perpetrators of rape.

Table 4: Respondents’ views on Victims’ culture of Silence (N=499)

Responses	Frequency	%
Stigmatization	458	91.8
Fear of being sexually abused again	211	42.3
Fear of being called a liar	294	58.9
Fear of being criticized	370	74.1
Fear of having to prove the incident in the court of law	290	58.1
Fear of lack of reasonable evidence to prove the act	326	65.3
Fear of what others would say	385	77.2

Source: Field Survey

From table 4 above, a huge majority 458(91.8%) of the respondents believe that victims of rape keep quiet reporting the act because of stigmatization. The experience if stigmatization most time sis due to the fact that many who are aware of the victims of rape sometimes spread the news not because of compassion or empathy but just for gossips and these sometimes aggravate the problems of the victims rather than heal them. Furthermore, those who believed that victims are scared of being sexually abused again and rather silent to avoid it, stood at 211(42.3%).Over half 58.9%of the respondents believe that victims assumed that they might be called liars if the report the act. A large majority (74.1%) believed that victims might be criticized once they report they act hence they chose not to. This may be so because many victims of rape are usually abused by someone close to them. Again might find it difficult to report because they believe that they may not be able to prove the incident in the court of law as reported by over half of the respondents 290(58.1%). Majority 65.3% also believed that victims might not have reasonable evidence to prove the act in the court of law hence they chose not to report being raped. Another major reason for the silence about reporting rape activities and perpetuation reported by a large majority (77.2%) is the fear about what people would say when they intend voice out the rape incident.

This result supports the findings of Achunike & Kitause (2014) which revealed that most victims of rape remained silent about the incident, because of stigmatization. The social stigma associated with rape forces female victims in

Nigeria to conceal rape assaults in order to save themselves from shame and public embarrassment.

Discussion

The study examined the perceived causal factors of rape and the role of the culture of silence on the perpetuation of rape. It further discussed the reasons for the culture of silence about rape which has aggravated the incidence. It examining the perceived causal factors, the study exposed the factors that predispose victims to being raped and involved in rape activities. Alcoholism was highlighted by majority a factor that predisposes to becoming victims of rape and perpetuating the act of rape. Indecent dressing was mentioned by a large majority as one of the perceived factors of involvement in rape and this finding corroborated the views of Omede, 2011 that women who dress indecently or provocatively are likely to be sexually abused. While this may be peculiar in African countries and particularly in Nigeria, the possible reason for such may be because the country is patriarchal in nature and perpetrators of rape have not being well sanctioned by the law court due to lack of adequate justice system and police that protect or defend victims of rape who are mainly women. The reason for this argument lies in the fact that the concept of “indecent dressing” is less emphasized in the developed world where it rampant, yet there are less incidences of rape there. This is perhaps so due to the available justice system to sanction perpetrators of rape and available policies that protect women from such. Furthermore, crave for sexual behavior, delinquent behavior, peer pressure and pornography were other major factors mentioned as predisposing factors for rape.

The reasons for the observed culture of silence about rape were also researched on. Stigmatization and feeling of shame and embarrassment were major reasons why victims kept silent about being raped rather than voicing out to expose the perpetrators so that they can be brought to book. Other factors perceived by individuals about the rape victims silence about being raped, included fear of being criticized (74.1%), stigmatization (91.8%), fear of being sexually abused again (42.3%), fear of being tagged liars (58.9%), fear of lack of reasonable evidence to prove the act (65.3%), having to prove the act in the court of law (58.1%) and fear of what others will say and corroborated the findings of Achunike & Kitause (2014) on the reasons for the increased culture of silence about rape and sexual violence in Nigeria. The implication of the increases in silence about rape is that perpetrators of rape go unpunished and continue in the act, and the victims continue to wallow in the pain and trauma of being sexually abused.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The incidence of rape is still very much a concern in the Nigerian society because of its rise rather than decrease particularly during the COVID-19

pandemic. A major reason of its rise aside from other factors is the culture of silence perhaps due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon and helplessness of women who are major victims of the phenomenon. There is therefore need to equip women, particularly the victims of rape and sexual abuse to ignore the consequences and speak out. This is important because of the popular saying that “a problem shared is half solved” so that they can first experience some form of healing.

Furthermore, the law enforcement agents need to bring to book the perpetrators of rape so that victims can be encouraged to speak out. Again policies that will protect women from being raped and sexually abused, needs to be enacted and properly implemented in the Nigerian society. This is to ensure that women can feel empowered and protected from sexual abusers.

Above all, women and the girl-child should be educated, enlightened and empowered both economically and with the necessary information. That way, they will be in a position to voice out against any form of abuse (including sexual abuse and rape) irrespective of how sensitive the matter is perceived. Such disposition of women will generally reduce the act of sexual abuse and rape in the Nigerian society.

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