

## **UPSURGE OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN NIGERIA DURING COVID - 19 PANDEMIC**

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### **Abstract**

*The concern of this paper is sexual abuse that was common during Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. It did not neglect the fact that sexual abuse comes in various forms like incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, child prostitution, boys initiating sex with older women and even feelings toward animals. In all, this paper paid attention to rape from the perspective of men forcing ladies and children for sex. This was common in Nigeria during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. At a stage, seven hundred and seventeen (717) cases of rape were reported in Nigeria during the time of pandemic lock down. Causes of rape were identified as early childhood environmental factor, antisocial personality traits, mental illness, sexual gratification, wickedness, anger and effect of drugs among others. All these factors eventually result into rape that had adverse effect on victims in form of depression, physical injury, shame and unsafe abortion. It was then recommended that proper parenting must be emphasized through governmental regular awareness programs and Churches' counselling sessions. Also, men caught in this act ought to be prosecuted and decent dressing among ladies and children should be encouraged. Descriptive research of correlational type was used for this study, since it attempted to solve the problems of sexual abuse in Nigeria by appealing to the use of existing phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Sexual abuse, Nigeria, Rape, Mental illness, shame, Unsafe abortion and decent dressing.

## **Introduction**

This paper discusses Covid-19 in relation to sexual abuse in Nigeria. Covid-19 pandemic appears to be originated from Wuhan seafood market where all sorts of wild animals like marmots, birds, rabbits, bats and snakes are merchandized illegally in China in 2019 and became a pandemic. It came to Nigeria in 2020 with fears and trembling. Many people had lost their lives because of this global pandemic as in the report of Rao (2020) “Till date (August 2020), more than three million people have been affected globally” p.2. It has its symptoms in dry cough, fever, difficulty in breathing, muscle pains, diarrhoea and sneezing. The precautionary measures were suggested as to be maintaining social distancing, regular washing of hands with soap under running water, using hand sanitizer, wearing of mask, coughing on the elbow, restriction of travels and above all, everybody must stay at home to enable governments and health workers control the spread of this pandemic.

During this stay-at-home exercise in Nigeria which attracts total lock down, there were records of sexual abuses. Although sexual abuses are not only common to Nigeria, it is a world-wide occurrence and it is part of human history ranging from ancient Greece to the time of the Bible. There were oral stories about rape in war, stretching from gang raping or warriors having children from unknown women. Therefore, rape is general to most cultures. In relation to this opinion, Eze (2013) affirms that “Sexual violence is a common phenomenon and occurs worldwide”(p.1). In another development, there was a feeling that incidents of sexual violence have long been a brutal part of the human story. Sometimes, they have changed the course of history.

Sexual abuse is any form of sexual assault coming from an older person to a more vulnerable one or again from one person to the other without consent. Moreover, sexual abuse is any sexual attacks from adults to the opposite sex (since it comes from man to woman or woman to man) without consensus. It involves force and violence in

many cases. Macmillan English dictionary defines sexual assault as “illegal sexual contact that usually involves force upon a person without consent or is inflicted upon a person who is incapable of giving consent (as because of age or physical or mental incapacity) or who places the assailant (as a doctor) in a position of trust or authority” (p.1303). This definition infers that sexual abuse or assault entails illegality, force and lack of consent. It means that it is between an unwilling and willing participant.

Sexual abuse can come in different forms extending from both sexes according to the argument of Eze (2013) that “Sexual assault encompasses a range of acts, including coerced sex in marriage and dating relationships, rape by strangers, organized rape in war, sexual harassment (including demands of sex for jobs or school grades), and rape of children, trafficking of women and girls, female genital mutilation, and forced exposure to pornography.” p.1, attention of Eze was on rape as it futures even in marriage, dating relationships and from an unknowing people.

In expanding this view, Rowan (2016) presents several practices of sexual raids in the society as “men have sex with boys or that in some cultures, children were introduced to sexual behavior by designated relatives, child prostitutes approach men in the streets, ...children are naturally curious about sexuality, and the abuser can rationalize or blame the victim, saying, for example, that the child asked for it, it was educational, or the devil made him do it. There are, however, a number of studies of boys who initiated sex with adults and felt that they possessed the power in the relationship” (p.2).

This assertion by implication means that homosexuality, incest, child prostitution and child curiosity, boys initiating sex with older women and even lesbianism are all forms of sexual abuses. Rowan is silent about rape as if other forms of sexual abuses have a bit of agreement and consciousness while rape is a forceful act upon the other party as Eze explained that even in an agreed relationship like marriage or dating relationship, rape can still occur. This, in the mind of the researcher, the other partner might be reluctant in having sex at a giving time. All these are not proper ways of having sexual relationships because like the saying goes, it takes two to tangle.

There must be an agreement between the partners before sexual relationship can occur.

Many people attributed this to indecent dressing of girls and ladies but Middleton (2020) has argued that children are even abused more especially during the pandemic when people were staying indoors and have the internet as companions. In her report, “records of 260,400 reports of sexual images/videos are on the internet, up from the 229,328 it had investigated the year before. Of that number, 132,700 were images or videos of children being sexually abused” (P.3). This assertion gives the impression that parents and guardians were not paying adequate attention to the type of images and videos their children were viewing on the internet during the lock down. Can this come as a result of indecent dressing of children as well? Ordinarily, children between ages zero to eight might not have anything in them to be attracted to men but these days, they are being used as sex materials even without their knowledge and consent especially during the pandemic lock down and most of the time by close relations or people like: uncles, family friends, class mates or peer groups, neighbours, even siblings. In some case, victims reported and they were told to resolve it as domestic problem that is, should be solved at home to save the image of their families.

This paper therefore is interested in sexual abuse from the perspective of rape. This means sexual abuse from men to ladies and children in Nigeria. Folayan, Odetoyinbo, Harrison and Brown (2014) conducted a research and discovered that “rape and abduction of 276 female adolescents in Nigeria have further stirred up discussions and media attention about rape of girls and women within the context of conflict in the country”p.3 In the same vein, the findings of the research conducted by Oludayo and Udechukwu (2020) indicated that females were reported more as victims of rape than males out of the 331 rape reports covered in the dailies. Although males were also victims of rape, the percentage was about 4%.

In the report of NOI- polls (2020), “about two million Nigerians (mainly women and girls) are raped every year” (p.4). This shows that rape was already in practice in Nigeria before Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic however, it became rampant as in the report of Mutau (2020). “The Nigerian police recorded 717 rape cases

between January and May” (p.3). This is a thing of concern as affected persons will continue to live in phobia and wavering. Some may even find it difficult to forget the experiences and be reluctant in relating well with men or to get married. No wonder, *Ezeilo and Oriye (2020)* feel that “there have been tales of woes for women and girls caught up in the web of the pervasive violence in public and private spaces, especially during this Covid-19 pandemic.” p.1. Sexual cannot just be occurring without some underlining factors. Therefore, the following are presented as causes of sexual abuse.

### **Causes of Sexual Abuse**

Causes of sexual abuse can vary from person to person. It results according to the disposition of individual. Groth (1979) opines that influences such as Psychological factors, Social factors and Economic factors are some of the causes of sexual violence such as rape, molestation, sexual harassment, stalking, incest and many others. In his explanation, **Psychological factors** projects a sexually violent men who have been shown to be more likely to consider victims responsible for the rape and are less knowledgeable about the impact of rape on victims. They also tend to have an exaggerated sense of masculinity. To them, the opposite sex must be conquered without reference to the norms and effects of it on the victims. It gives the idea that the rapists are having mental disorder in the mind of the researcher.

**Social factors**, this has a lot to do with family setup, because children brought up in environments that are physically violent, emotionally unsupportive and characterized by competition for scarce resources and having psychologically distant and uncaring fathers or parents are likely to be aggressive and prone to rape than children raised from free and open family and environments. **Economic factors**, these fallouts to issues like free trade, been accompanied by an increase in the movement of ladies and girls around the world including for sex work. If there are poverty and unemployment in a country, it increases the likelihood of sexual trafficking and sexual violence, all in the name of having a better living, financial stability and better future.

Groth, in his explanation on types of rape which is the focus of this paper, asserts that, it comes in various forms that have been characterized as anger rape, this type of offender attacks their victim by grabbing, striking and knocking the victim to the ground, beating them, tearing their clothes, and raping them. Another form is power assertive rapist who relies upon verbal threats, intimidation with a weapon, and only uses the amount of force necessary to subdue the victim. Power rapist believe that even though the victim initially resists them, that once they overpower their victim, the victim will eventually enjoy the rape. In case of Sadistic rape, the assaults are deliberate, calculated, and preplanned. They will often wear a disguise or will blindfold their victims. Also, sexual gratification rape is a case where the rapist believes that rape is an aggressive form of sexual coercion and the goal of rape is sexual entitlement and to gain a sense of power.

Faller (1998) identifies contributing factors to sexual abuse to be cultural, environmental, individual, and family factors. To him, whoever has sexual attraction toward children would be willing to act upon the thoughts and this will ultimately results into sexual abuse. There is no doubt about the fact that some children are naturally beautiful and if there is a little touch added to it by well to do parents or guardians, they appear charming. This is not to say that they must be abused because they are good-looking but that, they must be cherished.

Faller, in his clarification of sexual abuse says that: "Some perpetrators' primary sexual attraction is toward children, for example in the case of paedophiles. For other offenders the sexual feelings toward children appear to be situational. For example, offenders may become aroused by child pornography; physical contact, such as a child sitting in their lap, evokes a sexual response; or they have sexual feelings toward children when they are feeling psychologically vulnerable and regressed. Still, others are sexually responsive to a range of objects; adults and children, both male and female, and sometimes animals as well." p.90. This by inference means that sexual abuse is of different forms even to the extent of having feelings toward animals.

In the report of NOI- polls in 2020 about causes of rape in Nigeria, there was an impression that the increase of this menace is as a result of regular report of it on the media or there is just an increase of it in the Nation without a serious reason. In the minds of Oludayo and Udechukwu (2020) therefore, gaps that are embedded in the laws of the country and the strict adherence by the law court for the provision of burden of proof by the victim and the prosecutors; delays in the judicial system; corruption of the judiciary; stigmatization; family ties (in situations where rape/ child rape was committed by people who are close relatives of the victims as a result the family settles the case among themselves and therefore not report these crimes to the police for prosecution); fear of attacks and intimidation (in the sense that the victims most times are afraid that if they report, the perpetrator or rapist may re-attack them and in some cases these rapists are deadly and cruel) immoral dressing on the part of the girls and inadequate parental care are reasons for increase of rape in Nigeria.

It could be deduced then that, mental illness, revenge, show of power; anger, extortion, wickedness and oppression are the major reasons for men forcing ladies and girls for sex without considering the consequences of this act on the sufferers.

### **Effects of Sexual Abuse on Victims**

There is no doubt about the fact that anything coming out force especially in the case of rape will result in negative effects on the sufferer or the receiver. Therefore, rape will have the following effects on women- **Unsafe abortion**, this might occur as a result of a victim of rape getting pregnant for an unknown person. Even if the person is known, is it the appropriate person? Hence, to get out of this type of confusion, abortion is the only option. Abortion becomes unsafe when inexperienced people perform it or it is performed in an environment that is not hygienic. This at times might result in complications and even death.

Another effect is **Physical injury**, during the struggle for rape; a victim might sustain physical injury resulting from force, from the man who is physically stronger and mentally prepared than the rape. **Psychological effects** are another consequence of rape on the sufferer. This may not materialize at the initial stage, but as time goes on

feelings of anger, fear, shock, recurrent dreams and nightmares may appear and the need for more medical attention and counselling for the victim from the immediate family will become vital.

**Stigmatization-** victims of rape do suffer discrimination. They are deserted by friends and acquaintances for fear of not wanting to relate with somebody having a bad record or name in the vicinity. This eventually brings about shame or shameful feelings leading to depression on the part of the affected person. There is also the danger of infections or sexually transmitted diseases. These experiences are not far from what some Nigeria victims experienced about rape.

### **Covid - 19 and Sexual Abuse in Nigeria**

There have been series of report on sexual abuse in Nigeria in terms of men raping women and children, even before the era of Covid -19 pandemic as it reflects in the report of Folayan et al (2020) in the table below. The table shows that between July 2013 and July 2014, 130 rape cases were recorded. This number is without those that no number is attached like number one “increase of rape cases in Nigeria” and similar others. This is just to show that it is a regular occurrence.

### **Short list of reported rape in Nigerian media**

| <b>Source</b>                  | <b>Month–<br/>year</b> | <b>Article topic</b>                                                 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Independent Television & Radio | July 2013              | Increase in rape cases in Nigeria                                    |
| Gist Ville                     | October 2013           | 18-year old girl commits suicide after gang rape in Bayelsa          |
| Punch                          | February 2014          | Tackling the rape epidemic in Nigeria                                |
| HmmNaija.com                   | February 2014          | 12-year-old rape victim: I'm glad he had an accident after raping me |
| Vanguard                       | March 2014             | Obesere rape saga-case transferred to SCID                           |
| Nigerian Tribune               | April 2014             | Over 80 rape cases recorded in Edo                                   |

| Source                   | Month–<br>year | Article topic                                                          |
|--------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                          |                | State in 7 months                                                      |
| Premium times            | April 2014     | Checking high incidence of rape in Nigeria                             |
| Channels TV              | April 2014     | Ondo Police Record 45 Rape Cases in 2013                               |
| Scan News                | April 2014     | ICC moves against rape in Nigeria                                      |
| The Paradigm             | May 2014       | Two Chibok girls raped and left to die In Sambisa Forest By Boko Haram |
| Daily Post               | May 2014       | Gunmen invade Benue University, rape 20 female students                |
| News 24 Nigeria          | June 2014      | UN: Nigerian schoolgirls face rape danger                              |
| Naija Standard Newspaper | July 2014      | Policeman 32, rapes JSS 1 virgin girl                                  |

**Source: Folayan et al (2020)**

It came to its peak during Covid-19 pandemic probably because people were at home doing nothing and this abuse became a thing of recreation. On the 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2020, it was said over the radio that sexual assaults in Nigeria is on the increase and this was during the lock down. Around this time, women carrying placard had a peaceful protest to create awareness and to call for justice. The case of a 21 – year old lady who was raped and murdered in Enugu on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 caused heart breaks to her family. She was warming up to retake her JAMB before the incident. I was shocked as I heard about this story on the media and I exclaimed that oppression had killed an innocent soul!

In the report of Abubakar (2020), a 32-year-old man was caught in Kano and confessed that he had raped forty women including an 80-year-old within one year. This happened in June. At a stage, *Ezeilo and Oriye (2020)* acclaimed that “It is becoming clearer that we are not just fighting the Corona virus pandemic in Nigeria, but

also the rape epidemic happening upon the Covid-19 pandemic. On 26th June, the Katsina Police Command reported arrests of 40 suspected rapists within this period of the Covid-19 lockdown, between April and June, 2020.” Also, about 156 cases of rape, defilements and sexual assaults of under aged girls were recorded.

In the account of Isiaka (2020), “a lady (Name withheld) was raped and killed in her home; another lady, (Name withheld) was killed in her church in Benin City, southern Nigeria; and a 12-year-old girl was raped by 11 men in Jigawa, northern Nigeria ... However, there are fewer than 80 total recorded rape convictions in Nigeria.” This was in July.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the discussions above, the following recommendations are offered.

The Government should do more public awareness programme to emphasize the dangers of rape on both offenders and victims. Churches counselling sessions should also use the opportunity to stress the moral values and rightly state the fact that rape is a sin. The awareness program should also highlight the need for proper parenting. Attention given to children especially boys at tender age will go a long way in forming their core values.

Men caught in this act ought to be prosecuted and decent dressing among ladies and children should be encouraged.

While affected persons could contact sexually transmitted diseases without knowing it, the Government should have a system put in place to attend to victims in this type of situation.

The media is yet another place where all sorts of things are being learnt without proper monitoring. Parents and guardians however should scrutinize the type of online programs that children especially teens watch.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of rape is not strange to Nigeria as a Nation. It came to climax when people were enclosed and not busy at all. It may be difficult to understand why this was so. It is however important to note that many a time, those who rape are familiar people or distant

admirers. Therefore, this paper has been able to establish the fact that the period of Covid-19 pandemic lock down attracted a lot of sexual abuses especially rape in Nigeria. This occurred mainly because of routine activities of families and neighbors were also in door. Then the stable internet facilities were also a contributing factor.

When the society was saner and no sexual revolution, early marriage prevented regular rape and there was no education for girl child. This means, girls were not exposed to this because they marry at tender ages as contrary to what we have today. This is not enough justification though, since children of ages 2-5 years are been abused and these are not ripe enough for marriages. The society today is so porous that strange things are happening. Parents and Governments have much to do so as to save this present society for the future.

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