

Rape Scourge And Sexual Violence: A Sociological Perspective

¹OMOSEHIN, Foluke Morohunmubo *Ph.D*

²ALAUSA, Jamiu Abiodun

*Department Of Sociological Studies Education,
College Of Management And Social Science Education,
Lagos State University Of Education,
Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos State, Nigeria.*

Abstract

Sexual violence transcends borders, presenting substantial hurdles in numerous nations including Niger. This study explores the prevalence of rape in Nigeria, its causes and possible ways of combating it. Rape is a rampant and multifaceted scourge that affects individuals of all ages, leading to severe consequences for economic development, public health, and the fundamental human rights of women. Despite its pervasiveness, rape cases are significantly underreported due to societal relations and stigmatization. To effectively combat this epidemic, comprehensive strategies involving parents, civil society organizations, NGOs, and government agencies have been proposed. Qualitative sex education is crucial to empower Nigerian youth and foster a culture of respect and consent. Exposing and punishing perpetrators appropriately, upgrading laws, and providing support to victims are essential components of the fight against rape. A theoretical framework grounded in feminism highlights the power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality and women's vulnerability to sexual violence. Legal reforms and robust enforcement mechanisms are urgently needed to address the pervasive issue of sexual violence and to promote gender equality in Nigeria. Eradicating rape is essential for individual well-being and societal progress, ensuring the realization of human rights and gender equality.

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I. Introduction

Sexual violence stands as a significant obstacle across numerous nations worldwide, forming a kind of pervasive pandemic due to its widespread prevalence. Accordingly, the World Health Organization (2021) asserts that one in every three women globally has been victims of physical or sexual violence. The incidence is a transboundary malady prevalent in countries including Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Argentina, India, the Philippines, and Nigeria. The distressing reality of sexual violence in Nigeria has reached alarming proportions, casting a shadow over the lives of countless individuals. The United Nations Women reports that in 2020, 11,200 cases of rape were reported, which includes an alarming number of children who fell victim to this heinous crime with many losing their lives (Tolu-Kolawole, 2021). This is substantiated by the Lagos State Command of the Nigerian Police Force which reported that between April and June 2023, 111 cases of sexual assault including 14 rape cases and 56 instances of domestic violence were recorded (Premium Times, 2023).

There are several forms of sexual violence, such as sexual assault, child sexual abuse, incest, drug-facilitated sexual assault, intimate partner sexual violence, stalking, elder abuse, and rape (Wells 2012). Among the types of sexual violence, rape remains one of the most popular forms of violence that involve people of different ages (Ajayi et al, 2023). Rape is an endemic scourge in Nigeria and is believed at an alarming rate over the years. Instances of rape have been reported within educational institutions, hospital wards, places of worship, corporate offices, government establishments, and playgrounds, demonstrating a distressing lack of sanctity across settings (ThisDay, 2023). This phenomenon, constituting a grave violation of an individual's bodily autonomy, is most notably inflicted on girls and women, reflecting a deeply concerning gender pattern. The ramifications of rape are profound, leaving victims scarred and underscoring the gravity of this transgression. The emergence of rape within a societal fabric wherein individuals with perceived strength exploit and victimize the vulnerable underscores a disturbing undercurrent in social psychology. This unsettling reality raises critical questions about power dynamics and the manifestation of deeper societal deviation (ThisDay, 2023).

It is imperative to acknowledge that rape has evolved into a severe social problem that necessitates a comprehensive response. The underreporting of cases further exacerbates this issue, primarily due to factors such as insensitivity, fear of stigmatization, and persecution. This reluctance to report incidents contributes to a pervasive culture of impunity among perpetrators, perpetuating the cycle of violence. Combating rape faces numerous challenges, such as under-reporting, lack of justice, poor investigation, and victim blaming. Other barriers include police extortion, and a lack of confidence in the criminal justice system (Adebajo, 2019). Amnesty International (2021) observed that rape cases are significantly underreported due to victim condemnation and stigmatization.

According to Nwusulor and Onwubiko (2021), one in every four females has experienced sexual violence in Nigeria, while only a few such cases have been reported due to fear of stigmatization on the part of the public. Moreover, when victims report cases of rape, some are blamed and condemned for their dress, choice of friends, peer pressure, environment, and general indecency. As a result, victim blaming has been on the rise and remains an obstacle to combatting rape in Nigeria. This view presented by the authors corroborated the submission of the United Nations Children's Fund (2015) that despite the increase in the incidence of rape in Nigeria, particularly among teenagers, only a few (one in four girls and one in ten boys) file reports with the police. As a result, perpetrators of rape have been enabled to continue committing such crimes and escape justice.

Given the above, this study examines the prevalence of rape in Nigeria, while focusing on the types, causes, effects, and practical solutions to the menace. To achieve these objectives, this study adopts an exploratory analytical technique that relies on secondary sources of data, where materials are sourced from textbooks, journal articles, magazines, conference papers, periodicals, and other works applicable to the study.

II. Conceptual Review

Concept of rape

Rape is defined in Section 357 of the Nigerian Criminal Code Act (1990) as the act of engaging in "unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with her consent if the consent is obtained by force or using threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or using false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or, in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband" (Nigerian Criminal Code Act, 1990). However, contemporary perspectives have evolved, viewing rape as an act of power and dominance where one individual exerts control over another (Brigneti & Egbonimali, 2002). This study explores the universal nature and devastating impact of rape, with a particular focus on Nigeria's situation. The issue of rape extends beyond geographical boundaries, cutting across races, tribes, and classes. It is a universal phenomenon that is pervasive in all cultures, both in ancient and modern times. Rape is one of the most brutal forms of violence against women, impeding their right to self-preservation and infringing upon their right to privacy. It represents a specific form of human violence with powerful implications for both the victim and broader society (Chiazor et al, 2016).

While the act of rape is not a recent occurrence, trends reveal an increase in its prevalence. The effects of these incidents have become more harmful, not only to immediate victims but also to their families and communities. Specifically, 18.1% of rape cases out of 10,000 were reported to police (CLEEN Foundation, 2005). Furthermore, other reported cases include; 2,284, 2,084, 2,253, 1,626 and 1,835 in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively (CLEEN foundation, 2005) It is crucial to acknowledge that these figures represent only a fraction of actual incidents due to underreporting, reflecting the prevailing reluctance to bring such cases to the attention of law enforcement authorities.

Rape as a global concern

Rape is a global issue that transcends national boundaries and affects individuals in diverse cultures and societies. Numerous countries have witnessed alarming incidents of sexual assault, shedding light on the gravity of this problem. This study explores various international rape cases, focusing on examples from Uganda, India, North America, England, and Wales. Additionally, it addresses the growing concern over women's rights and the need for preventive strategies to combat this menace. In Uganda, a disheartening case emerged in which a teenage girl was sentenced to a six-hour jail term for attempting to kill her rapist father (Sunday Sun, January 6, 2013). The father, a 58-year-old man, repeatedly raped his daughter from the tender age of 13 years, exposing the vicious cycle of violence perpetrated within familial settings.

Similarly, India has grappled with a distressing epidemic of rape cases, with statistics indicating that a woman is raped every 20 minutes in the country. One notorious incident involved the brutal gang rape and assault of a 23-year-old female medical student by six men on a bus in New Delhi (Dominique, 2013). The victim succumbed to fatal internal injuries, prompting widespread outrage and drawing attention to women's vulnerability in Indian society. In North America, sexual assault continues to pose a significant threat to women

with a high probability of victimization during their lifetime. The frequency of such attacks underscores the urgency for comprehensive prevention strategies and support mechanisms for survivors.

England and Wales also face substantial challenges in dealing with rape cases. Between 2010 and 2012, an estimated 78,000 victims experienced rape annually, with 69,000 females and 9,000 males affected (Guardian, 2013). These statistics underscore the need for concerted efforts to address the systemic issues that contribute to sexual violence in these regions. Women's movements have played a vital role in elevating concerns about sexual assault and its far-reaching consequences for victims. As a result, scholars from various disciplines have directed their attention to studying the dynamics of rapists, institutional and cultural factors promoting rape, and factors influencing victims' experiences and responses. A shift toward prevention strategies has gained momentum to combat the rising tide of rape incidents. Leaders, such as the Lord Bishop of Osun State, Nigeria, and Rev Afolabi Popoola, have linked alarming cases of rape, especially against minors, rituals, and material gain (Punch, 2012). This underscores the importance of both public awareness and law enforcement efforts to address the root causes of sexual violence.

The issue of rape in Nigeria has garnered widespread attention with alarming incidents prompting various stakeholders to take action. Recently, significant efforts have been made to create awareness and eradicate rape through campaigns led by government officials, women's organizations, and human rights bodies. Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, including the slow response of the justice system and the lack of supportive institutions for victims. This paper examines the efforts made to combat rape in Nigeria as well as the factors contributing to its rise and the consequences endured by victims. In Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria, about 400 women took to the streets to march against rape, highlighting the prevalence of this issue in society (Punch, 2012). The campaign, led by the wife of the State Governor, Mrs Sherifat Aregbesola, aimed to raise awareness and mobilize women to support the eradication of rape in the state. She called on parents to be vigilant in monitoring their children and encouraged support for the state government's efforts to combat rape.

Hajia Zainab Maina, Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development, expressed deep concern over the high incidence of rape and sexual violence against women in Nigeria (Punch, 2012). She emphasized the need for concerted efforts to end these crimes, citing instances where such acts had resulted in the untimely death of many women and girls. Hajia Maina decried the pervasive nature of sexual violence, characterizing it as a clear violation of the human rights of women. Professor Ben Angwe, the Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), urged Nigerians not to succumb to fear and to report rape cases to the appropriate authorities (Punch, 2012). He expressed deep concern about the rising cases of rape in the country, emphasizing that the levels of these incidents were disturbing. Despite collective efforts to combat rape, several challenges remain. The slow response of the justice system and the lack of supportive institutions to assist victims in overcoming trauma have been identified as significant contributing factors to the increasing incidence of rape in Nigeria. The fear of stigmatization further compounded the suffering of victims, leading to instances where some resorted to drastic measures such as suicide.

Incidence of rape

In Nigeria, rape incidents are on the rise. There is a long list of rape instances in the mass media. In Nigeria, rape has developed into a widespread social phenomenon, not a lone criminal crime that only affects a few women and girls. In Nigeria, sexual assault on children under the age of twelve has become a widespread occurrence. Women who are adolescents or young adults are at significant risk. Even elderly ladies in Nigeria are not exempt from this assault. According to Chiedu (2012), there are a number of unacceptable situations concerning rape. For example. There have been reports of teachers abusing a student, religious leaders abusing their followers, robbers abusing their victims, men abusing their sister-in-law or daughter-in-law, masters abusing housekeepers, security guards abusing their master's wives, bosses abusing their staff, fathers abusing their daughters, young men abusing their grandmothers, minor abusing another minor, traditional ruler abusing his chief's wife. Rape cases constitute a distressing truth within contemporary Nigerian society, a glaringly evident reality. It seems that individuals of all genders - girls, boys, women, and men - encounter sexual exploitation on a daily basis, perhaps even at the hands of acquaintances, demonstrating a callous exploitation of their familiarity. (Udekwe, 2013).

Accordingly, Rotimi (2012) frowns at the rising cases of child abuse and rape in Lagos State, Nigeria. She further disclosed that her office receives daily cases of children being defiled, often by individuals closely connected to their families. Unfortunately, securing convictions for rape perpetrators has proven challenging for the office of public defender, due to victims' reluctance to report such crimes, primarily because of the fear of social stigma associated with doing so. Another edition of the same newspaper highlighted a distressing incident in which a 62-year-old man was arraigned before a Magistrate Court in Ogun State for defiling his 10-year-old step-daughter. Similarly, on October 5, 2012, the Nation Newspaper reported the banishment of a 70-year-old man in Utulu, Oru West Local Government Area of Imo State, for defiling a 3-year-old child. In yet another heartbreaking case published in the Punch Newspaper on January 30, 2012, Mr. Innocent Francis, father of the 8-

year-old Endurance, who was raped and murdered, faced threats to his life after reporting his daughter's plight to the police. The Ekiti State Police Command arrested an 85-year-old man, Samuel Oladipupo, on November 29, 2012, to rape a 12-year-old J. S. 1 pupil. According to Dr. Omolara Smith, President of Zonta Club II, Ibadan, these figures have surged from 12.5 percent to approximately 84 percent in recent months (Sunday Sun, January 6th, 2013). She expressed concern that these figures may further increase if immediate and effective measures are not taken to address this worrisome development.

Specifically, in the first seven months of 2008, Delta State alone reported 1128 rape cases, according to Women of Compassion Worldwide. Cross-River, Ebonyi, and Bayelsa States were ranked first among the 36 states of the federation for robbery, rape, and murder in a 2010 National Crime and Safety Survey performed by CLEEN Foundation with funding from the Macarthur Foundation. January 6, 2013 (Sunday). Abdullahi Ibrahim, a police officer in Zamfara State's up-north region, was fired for raping a 15-year-old girl in the area's Maradun Local Government Area.

In 2012, Nigeria witnessed a disturbing surge in reported rape cases, highlighting the grave nature of this issue. On October 5, 2012, Daily Sun recounted the harrowing tale of a 20-year-old lady allegedly raped and subjected to the horrific act of having her lip chopped off by two men. Similarly, on October 16, 2012, the same newspaper reported a case of a father who raped his 12-year-old daughter, revealing the shocking reality of familial sexual abuse.

Another deeply concerning incident involved a man named Temitope Alo, who defiled eight minors between the ages of eight (8) and fifteen (15) years in the Koloba area of Ayobo, a suburb of Lagos. In Bayelsa State, the police had to grapple with an increase in rape cases within relief camps established for flood-displaced individuals in October 2012. Approximately five such cases were recorded at camps located in the sports complex in Yenagoa. Equally distressing was the incident in Kano, where a female Corp member endured the terrifying experience of being gang-raped by four men inside the classroom at noon. The historical records from 2012 in Rivers State are equally unsettling, indicating that no fewer than 1200 girls fell victim to rape during that year (Kawu, 2013).

Even more tragically, a man was allegedly raped to death by his six wives in the early hours of Tuesday, July 17, 2012, in the Ogbadibo Local Government Area of Benue State (Malcolm, 2012). Additionally, in Enugu State, the arrest of a notorious elderly woman rapist in Opi Village, Nsukka Local Government Area, took place in May 2013. The perpetrator reportedly confessed in court that he committed these acts out of frustration, as he could not find a young woman to marry (Kawu, 2013).

These distressing incidents underscore the urgency of comprehensive measures and societal efforts to combat and prevent rape in Nigeria. The safety and well-being of individuals, particularly women and children, must be prioritized to address this pervasive problem. (Kawu, 2013; Malcolm, 2012). In Nigeria, there is a legal gap regarding rape within marriage, where forced or coerced sexual intercourse between spouses is not recognized as a crime under Nigerian law. This omission has significant implications for married women's safety and well-being. In the northern part of Nigeria, which is predominantly Muslim and follows Sharia law, there are even provisions that allow a husband to withhold maintenance from his wife if she refuses to engage in sexual intercourse. This legal context further exacerbates married women's vulnerability to sexual abuse.

Unfortunately, customary laws in Nigeria also do not recognize the rape of a wife as an offence, and they remain unpunished even if the wife experiences bodily harm during a forced sexual encounter with her husband. This lack of legal protection perpetuates a cycle of abuse and violates women's fundamental rights in marital relationships. The absence of legal recourse for women facing sexual violence within marriage underscores the urgent need for legal reform and societal awareness. Recognizing marital rape as a crime and providing avenues for legal redress can help protect married women from such abuse and ensure that their rights and dignity are upheld. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive efforts from lawmakers, policymakers, and society to create a safe and supportive environment for all women in Nigeria.

Causes of rape

The situation in Nigeria is deeply concerning, as poorly defined criminal laws and weak law enforcement have created an environment in which rape is committed with impunity, as highlighted by Amnesty International in 2006. The inadequacy of the law in addressing this issue has led women advocates to take matters into their own hands, focusing on prevention by educating the public, ensuring that quality services are available to support victims, and encouraging accountability. Despite the Child Rights Law enacted by the federal government in May 2003, which prescribes life imprisonment for anyone convicted of rape, law enforcement seems to be lacking, resulting in continued instances of rape and molestation of women and girls (Odeh, 2013).

Various factors contribute to the prevalence of rape in Nigeria. Economic and political conditions, along with deeply entrenched social norms, often perpetuate stereotypical divisions between men and women, leading to unequal power dynamics that facilitate sexual violence. Additionally, alcohol and drug abuse, idleness, pornography, psychological disorders, and keeping bad company can contribute to the occurrence of rape. Despite

the complexity of this issue, experts attribute the persistent nature of rape cases in Nigeria to a combination of these factors. Addressing this deeply rooted problem requires comprehensive efforts, including legal reforms, improved law enforcement, societal awareness campaigns, and support systems for victims. Only by working collectively can Nigeria hope to tackle this grave issue and create a safe environment for all citizens.

Impact of Modernization on Attitudes towards Sex: The increasing exposure of Nigerian adolescents to modernizing influences has played a significant role in shaping their attitudes towards sex. The pervasive availability of sexual content in novels, books, magazines, newspapers, pornographic movies, and advertisements has sparked curiosity and interest in sexual experiences among younger generations. Moreover, sexual graphic music, movies, and literature directed at adolescents have further intensified their fascination with sex. The pressure to engage in sexual activities is compounded by television programs that use sex as a marketing tool for various products, leading some adolescents to feel compelled to experiment with sex and even resort to rape in some cases. The allure of experiencing sex just once may trap them in a spiral of immorality, making rape an unfortunate consequence for Nigerian youths (Chiazor et al, 2016).

Poor handling of rape: Another crucial factor contributing to the impunity of rapists is the inadequacy of rape laws in Nigeria (Ejim 2013). The current legal framework appears to revictimize and humiliate women rather than bring them justice. The stringent requirements for providing authentic evidence of rape, including obtaining a medical and police report immediately after the incident, can trivialize the seriousness of the crime. Moreover, there are distressing reports of police officers treating rape victims as if they were offenders themselves. In some cases, the police may demand that bribes investigate rape cases, or they may accuse victims of consenting to sexual encounters with rapists.

The mishandling of rape cases contributes to a culture of tolerance for sexual violence against Nigerian women. This culture of impunity has led to countless cases of violence against children and women remaining unprosecuted, leaving perpetrators free to continue their offences. A glaring example of this problem was a court case in 1999, in which a little girl of six years was sexually assaulted by her uncle. Despite the evidence, including bloodied pants, the testimony of the mother, and medical evidence from a government hospital, the magistrate acquitted the accused person due to a lack of corroboration (Chiazor et al, 2016).

These issues underscore the urgent need for comprehensive legal reforms, improved law enforcement, and societal awareness campaigns to combat rape and protect the rights and safety of Nigerian women and children.

Impact of Peer Group Dynamics: Peer influence plays a significant role in the rising incidence of rape in Nigeria. Innocent youths who associate with rapists may be influenced to adopt harmful behaviour in their pursuit of acceptance and approval from their peers. Adolescents often feel the need to experiment with sex, including resorting to rape, to fit in with their peer groups. Studies have shown that children who are more influenced by their parents are more likely to adopt socially acceptable sexual behaviours, highlighting the powerful impact of peer group pressure on adolescents' actions.

Influence of cultural beliefs and misconceptions regarding sex: Misconceptions and myths regarding sex have contributed to the growing incidence of rape in Nigeria. In some ethnic groups, it is believed that premarital sexual intercourse is necessary for boys to avoid having small testicles, suffering from pimples, or experiencing difficulties in erection when married. Girls are believed to face various health issues if they do not engage in premarital sex. Some HIV-infected individuals also believe that having sex with a virgin will cure them of AIDS, leading them to resort to raping innocent girls in their search for a cure. These unfounded beliefs perpetuate dangerous behaviour and contribute to the prevalence of rape cases (Chiazor et al, 2016).

Impact of Dressing and Sexualization in Rape Cases: Indecent dressing among women and girls, characterized by revealing clothing that exposes parts of the body that should be covered, can contribute to rape incidents. This type of dressing may attract the opposite sex and incite lustful thoughts, potentially leading to a sexual assault. In Nigeria, it has become fashionable, particularly among young females, to dress in provocative and revealing ways. Such dressing can ignite sexual desires in men and contribute to sexual seduction. The prevalence of indecent dressing, especially among college and university students, has become a common mode of dressing in Nigeria. Some parents even buy clothes for their children with negative inscriptions that promote sexualization, further contributing to the issue.

Addressing the underlying factors that contribute to rape in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach, including comprehensive sex education, challenging harmful myths and beliefs, promoting respectful attitudes towards women, and advocating responsible media portrayals of sex and relationships. Additionally, fostering a society that values consent, respect, and gender equality is essential to preventing sexual violence and ensuring a safer environment for all (Chiazor et al, 2016).

Adolescent Sexual Development: Adolescents often experience strong sexual desires and curiosity, which may lead them to experiment with various aspects of sexuality including rape. Hormonal changes and increased sexual interest during adolescence contribute to increased sexual activity. This stage is critical and

tumultuous, characterized by confusion and turbulence, as adolescents navigate their sexual development (Benwell, 2002).

The Stigma of Rape: In Nigeria, rape victims, especially women, face double victimization. They suffer from the violence they endure and the government's failure to bring their abusers to justice. A culture of silence surrounds rape in Nigeria as female victims often choose to conceal rape assaults to avoid shame and public embarrassment. Even parents of rape victims may find it challenging to publicly report such cases. When a woman is raped and the incident becomes public knowledge, she and her family may face ostracization due to the dishonour associated with rape. Additionally, maintaining a cordial relationship with the perpetrator's family may discourage the victim's family from reporting a crime. This lack of reporting and the subsequent lack of accountability for perpetrators creates an environment where others may feel emboldened to commit rape, knowing that they may go unpunished (Chiazor et al, 2016).

Rape and Nigerian Legal Framework: Gender-based violence, including rape, remains a pressing concern in Nigeria, and both federal and state authorities have struggled to address this issue effectively. One factor contributing to the escalating cases of rape in the country is the interpretation of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 357 of the Criminal Code Act, CAP 77, LFN, 1990, defines rape as engaging in unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent or with consent obtained through force, threats, intimidation, false representation, or impersonation of a husband in the case of a married woman (Musbau, 2013). Furthermore, Section 282 of the Penal Code states that sexual intercourse with a wife is not considered rape if she has attained puberty (Olurounbi, 2013). This has the troubling implication of potentially exonerating those who commit child rape under the guise of marriage and raises questions about the Constitution's disregard for the necessity of full maturity (at least 18 years old) before marriage.

Existing Nigerian laws appear inadequate in preventing rape, particularly when it involves minors and is concealed within the context of marriage. The coexistence of customs and Sharia laws alongside the national constitution has further complicated efforts to combat gender-based violence. These customary and religious legal systems, prevalent in different regions of the country, often perpetuate practices that contradict the rights protected by the Nigerian Constitution and disproportionately affect women (Musbau, 2013).

One significant obstacle to prosecuting rape cases in Northern Nigeria is the tolerance of Sharia law, which poses challenges to legal proceedings and justice. Recognizing the severity of the situation, the House of Representatives in Abuja took action on March 5, 2013, approving life imprisonment as a punishment for anyone found guilty of rape. Additionally, they sanctioned a minimum of 20 years in prison, without the option of a fine for convicted individuals. The Senate later adopted similar measures to strengthen the fight against rape in Nigeria (Akumadu 2007).

Despite these legislative efforts, it is clear that more comprehensive actions are required to effectively combat gender-based violence in Nigeria. Enhancing the enforcement of existing laws, implementing awareness and education programs, and promoting cultural and attitudinal shifts are crucial steps in addressing the root causes of gender-based violence and protecting the rights and well-being of women and children in the country.

Inadequate Parental Guidance: The influence of modernity has brought about changes in parenting practices, leading some parents to adopt an overly indulgent approach, neglecting to impose firm boundaries on their children. Additionally, certain parents carelessly engage in extramarital affairs, setting a detrimental example for their offspring (Obasi 2007). Consequently, these children may develop traits of rudeness, arrogance, and wayward behaviour. It is important to note that growing up in such an environment might increase the likelihood of some individuals resorting to committing rape.

Covid19 Pandemic: The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on Nigerian society, affecting various aspects such as education, health, economy, security, and crime. Notably, it has led to an increase in criminal activities, including banditry, extremism, kidnapping, robbery, and sexual violence. One particularly alarming consequence was the surge in rape cases during this period, as reported by Amnesty International (2021), which documented a total of 11,200 rape incidents in 2020. The research conducted by Nwusulor and Onwubiko (2021) reported results which further supports this trend, revealing that Nigerian Police recorded 717 rape cases in the first quarter of 2020 across different geopolitical zones in the country. Among these regions, the highest number of rape cases was reported in Southwest Nigeria, where approximately 91 and 296 cases were documented in March and April 2020, respectively.

The authors attributed this spike in rape cases to the implementation of lockdown measures during the pandemic. The restrictions on citizens' activities and movements have made them more vulnerable to crime and social vices, including sexual violence. The limited access to public spaces, reduced social interactions, and economic hardships during the lockdown likely contributed to the heightened risk for potential victims and facilitated opportunities for perpetrators to commit such heinous acts.

The combination of increased vulnerability and reduced oversight during the Covid-19 pandemic underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to protect vulnerable populations and combat sexual violence in Nigeria. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that includes raising

awareness, providing resources for victims, enhancing law enforcement efforts, and implementing measures to prevent and deter perpetrators from committing such crimes.

Theoretical Framework (Theory of Gender and Power)

The treatment of women in society has been a long-standing concern, and feminists have sought to understand the root causes of gender inequality. Betty Friedan (1963) famously referred to the pervasive issue as “the problem without a name,” highlighting the elusive nature of gender discrimination. A critical examination of societal structures reveals the prevalent dominance of men over women in various societies. To explore and analyze this issue, this study is anchored to the theoretical framework of feminism. Feminism is not merely a set of beliefs, but also a comprehensive theoretical construct that delves into the nature of women, the roles they play, the oppression they face, and their overall significance within the fabric of social reality. At its core, feminism seeks to challenge and dismantle patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender-based inequalities and power imbalance.

One influential theoretical perspective on Feminism is the Theory of Gender and Power presented by Cornell (1987). This theory posits that women's experiences are significantly shaped by their power dynamics. According to Cornell, cultural norms and practices form the foundation of the gender division of labour, roles, and contributions assigned to both men and women. However, these cultural norms often lead to the subjugation of women by positioning men in roles that facilitate their domination of women. Consequently, these culturally defined gender boundaries impact women's life experiences, opportunities, and overall social status, leading to marginalization, poverty, and powerlessness.

The Theory of Gender and Power is particularly relevant in situating the structure and understanding of the occurrence of rape. Women's vulnerability to sexual violence can be traced back to gender differentials perpetuated by cultural norms. As women are often relegated to positions of subservience, they may become targets of sexual violence, as an expression of male dominance over women. This skewed power relationship, where women are oppressed and victimized, often hinders them from seeking justice for crimes committed against them. Instead, many women suffer in silence, fearing the social stigma and shame associated with being victims of rape (Onyejekwe, 2008).

Recent feminist perspectives have further highlighted rape as a manifestation of male dominance and egregious violation of women's rights. In many cultures, rape victims endure additional suffering as they are subjected to a trial-like process, facing victim-blaming and derogatory labels such as “gold digger,” “accuser,” “seducer,” or “frivolous person.” Regrettably, Nigerian culture and the judiciary system are not immune to these harmful practices, adding to the challenges faced by rape victims who must often provide evidence, such as semen, to prove their victimhood (Onyejekwe, 2008). In countries like Nigeria, where there is a lack of clearly defined criminal laws on rape and weak enforcement, the prevalence of rape remains a concern. The failure of the judiciary system to address rape cases has been considered a grave violation of women's human rights (Imokuede, 2007; Onyejekwe & Muoghalu, 2008). This highlights the urgent need for legal reforms and robust enforcement mechanisms to combat the pervasive problem of sexual violence and to promote gender equality in Nigeria.

Way Forward

Rape in Nigeria is a multifaceted challenge with severe consequences for economic development, public health, and women's fundamental human rights. It demands immediate attention from all sectors of society, including academia and legal, religious, medical, and political circles. Urgent action is necessary to protect the rights and dignity of victims and to create a safer environment for all. To effectively combat this problem, comprehensive strategies involving various stakeholders have been proposed.

Parents play a crucial role in protecting their children from the risks of rape. It is essential to build strong, healthy, and open relationships with children. Parents should be vigilant in observing any signs of vulnerability or abuse, and educate their children about the dangers of rape. Conversations about sex-related issues at the appropriate time and place can foster awareness and safety. Furthermore, parents should be cautious about entrusting their children to unfamiliar individuals and encouraging their daughters to dress modestly to reduce their vulnerability.

Civil society organizations and NGOs should conduct extensive enlightenment campaigns against rape and rapists. Adopting a zero-tolerance approach to rape and dispelling sex myths through the media can contribute to changing societal attitudes and behaviours.

Banning hawking by children and female teenagers can help to protect vulnerable individuals from potential predators and reduce the risk of rape.

To combat rape effectively, every perpetrator must be exposed and held accountable for their actions. There should be no tolerance for shielding or protecting rapists from any segment of the society, including parents, religious institutions, or the media.

Outdated and inadequate laws on rape should be upgraded to provide better protection to victims. Every rape case should be given a chance to see the light of day in the courts, and severe sanctions should be imposed on perpetrators.

Rape victims require significant love and care to restore their self-esteem and wellbeing. Legislative bodies, state ministries, women's groups, and the Federal Government should actively address these cases and offer comprehensive assistance to victims.

Reducing bride prices can promote marriage and encourage responsible relationships in Nigeria.

The international community, including the United Nations and African Union, should actively support Nigeria in implementing international and regional treaties aimed at condemning, prohibiting, and preventing all forms of violence against women.

Civil society groups should demand that women in Nigeria be treated as equal members of society, and actively create an environment that supports and addresses all forms of violence.

The judiciary and legal system should ensure that all rape cases, especially those involving minors, are heard behind closed doors to protect victims' privacy and dignity.

Women activists and organizations must join forces to confront violence against women and challenge gender inequality. Activism, advocacy, and unity are vital for bringing about meaningful changes and addressing the culture of violence.

Establishing committees with national guidelines for the medical and social management of rape and sexual violence is crucial. In addition, establishing a reliable database for rape cases can aid in monitoring trends and formulating effective policies.

Enhanced collaboration between the health sector and the justice system is essential, especially concerning evidence collection for prosecution purposes.

Government support is crucial for managing rape cases. A certain percentage of statutory allocation should be devoted to managing rape cases annually, including bearing the cost of legal representation of victims.

Qualitative sex education and guidance are essential for reducing the prevalence of rape. Stakeholders should collaborate to implement educational programs that address consent, boundaries, and respect for the rights of others.

Exposing and appropriately punishing perpetrators is crucial for deterring future offences and ensuring justice for survivors. A strong legal framework, with severe penalties for rape offences, can serve as a powerful deterrent.

Systematic and comprehensive documentation of violence against women, including rape, is essential to develop evidence-based policies and intervention strategies.

Rape survivors must have access to redress and comprehensive support services. The government should ensure that all women who have experienced violence, including rape, receive appropriate redress and support.

The fight against the rape scourge requires a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil societies, NGOs, religious institutions, and healthcare providers, is vital for developing holistic strategies. Public awareness campaigns, training for law enforcement, legal reforms, and community engagement are all essential components for tackling rape effectively.

By integrating these strategies and engaging in collective efforts, Nigeria can take significant steps toward reducing the occurrence of rape and creating a safer and more equitable society. Eradicating this scourge is not only essential for individual well-being but also for the country's progress and the realization of gender equality and women's fundamental human rights.

III. Conclusion

Rape in Nigeria is an alarming and multifaceted challenge that has far-reaching implications for the country's economic development, public health, and violation of women's fundamental human rights. This grave issue demands urgent attention from all segments of society, including academia and legal, religious, medical, and political circles. The imperative to confront this abhorrent offence arises from the necessity to safeguard the rights and dignity of victims, while simultaneously fostering a more secure atmosphere for all. As such, this study proposes comprehensive strategies involving collaboration among social institutions, parents, religious institutions, civil societies, NGOs, and government agencies to effectively combat and reduce the scourge of rape in Nigeria. Integral to the fight against rape is the implementation of effective documentation, redress, and support services for survivors. These essential components play a pivotal role in empowering victims and providing them with the necessary assistance and resources to heal and seek justice. By adopting qualitative sex education, society can empower Nigerian youths to make informed decisions, foster a culture of respect, and reduce the likelihood of rape. However, one of the significant challenges in combatting rape is the alarming silence of the victims. Victims often feel humiliated and intimidated by the police and are afraid of public acknowledgement, which perpetuates the cycle of violence and allows perpetrators to evade accountability. This reluctance to come forward inhibits efforts to fully grasp the magnitude of the problem and provides adequate support to those affected. To effectively

address this issue, there is an urgent need for collaboration among stakeholders and the implementation of a multifaceted approach. Stakeholders must work together to create an environment in which survivors feel safe to report incidents and seek justice. This requires not only reforming the legal framework and enhancing law enforcement but also fostering a culture of support, understanding, and empathy for survivors.

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