

# PREVALENCE OF VIOLENT SEXUAL ASSAULT ON SOUTH WEST NIGERIA GIRLS

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## Abstract

The study investigated the prevalence of violent Sexual Assault on South West Nigeria girls. It investigated the etiological and causative factors engendering sexual assault, characteristics of males that sexually assault and reasons why rapists assault. Also, myths about sexual assault, conditions that precipitates sexual assault, predicaments of sexual assault and intervention or needs of sexually assaulted survivors.

Descriptive research design of the survey type was used in the study; the researcher surveyed the entire vulnerable female girls in South West Nigeria. Reports in national dailies and various sophisticated media indicated that majority of the girls are sexually abused and vulnerable to sexual assault. There are cultural, mythical, social and psychological factors enhancing the susceptibility of female children to sexual assault. There are indications that socio economic variables enhance the amenability of girls to sexual assault. Based on this, parents, teachers and significant others should orientate vulnerable girls and discourage cultural norms that engenders sexual assault. The law enforcement agents should sharpen all their weapons of sanitation to curb the prevalence of sexual assault in the society. The curriculum planners should imbibe this in the curriculum subjects and discourage the tenacity of assault. The study will be of benefit to vulnerable girls, parents, students, teachers, counsellors, law enforcement agents and care givers.

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**Keywords:** Rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault, counselling, date and acquaintance

## Introduction

The terminology sexual assault is a composite term. Generally, it refers to rape or other forms of sexual abuse. Definition of sexual assault varies from individual to individual and professional to professionals.

Sometimes it is based on sex, religion, age and so on. From women's perspective, Brownmiller (1975) defined "rape" as sexual invasion of the body by force, an incursion into the private personal inner space without consent, an internal assault from one of several avenues and by one of several methods that constitutes a deliberate violation of emotional, physical and rational integrity and is hostile degrading act of violence. The U.S Department of Justice (2003) declared that 6 in 10 assaulted victims reported that offender was an intimate, relative, a friend or acquaintance.

The situation is very rife in Nigeria. There are adequate reports on daily bases of parents assaulting children, proprietors of schools assaulting pupils, grandfather raping grandchild. Virtually everything is vividly seen in the Nigeria newspapers and sophisticated media about the tenacity and the tendentious sexual assaults metted on Nigeria girls. These are equally reported in virtually all the developing nations across the world. About 103,000 children are reported as having been sexually abused in the United States out of 903,000 child maltreatment cases. Salter (1988) reported that on the issue of child sexual abuse in nonclinical population studies and estimated that up to 38 percent of females and 11 percent of males had been sexually abused.

Schwartz- Kenny, McCauley&Epstem (2001) reported that the situation is debilitating in Asia and Africa. Unfortunately, majority of the sexual assault offenders commit the crime with impunity in these developing nations because of cultural inhibitions and shyness.

In some cases,horrifically, children are sold into slavery or thralldom as child prostituted and servants by their impoverished parents. The horrific trade of child trafficking that is defying all weapons of sanitation in Nigeria is one of the banes that are promoting sexual assault in Nigeria. The U.S Department of Justice (1998) reported that majority of sexual assault are perpetrated on children and female under age 15.

It is terrifying that 50 to 90 percent of all rapes or attempted rapes were unreported. Most of the incest and molestation are never reported. More so, date rapes and stranger rapes are not reported due to shame, humiliation, guilt, cultural taboos; and to avoid victimization at the hands of medical authorities. Many of the cases are throne away in the law courts because of lack of evidences and distortion of evidences by law enforcement agents and inadequate exhibits for prosecution.

### **Etiological and Causative Factors Engendering Sexual Assault**

The reasons why South West people are involved in sexual assault is genealogical, cultural and psychological. Brownmiller (1975) and Eisler (1987-1995) reported that male dominance is the driving force in rape in all cultures. The culture of Yoruba land of Nigeria appears to subsume all

females under male dominance. These cultural and psychological factors are exemplified in social, personal and psychological factors and myth about rape.

The personal and psychological factors that engender rape are unique to men who sexually assault children. This is also evident in decision to assault and the way the assault is carried out (Amir, 1971, Groth & Birnbaum 1979, Williams & Holmes 1981)

### **Characteristics of Males that Sexually Assault**

- i. They act in a hostile, aggressive, angry, condescending and domineering manner and believe he is strong, courageous. Even though he often feels weak, anxious, inadequate & dependent.
- ii. Lack the interpersonal skills to make his point in society
- iii. May need to exercise power; he proves to the raped that he is powerful, omnipotent and in total control.
- iv. He may display sadistic patterns using extreme violence and often mutilates or murders the victim in order to attain a feeling of total triumph over the victim.

### **Reasons Why Rapists Assault**

The interview conducted by Marolla (1998) while he interviewed convicted rapists summarily revealed that :

- i. It is used as punishment because a specific woman has done them wrong, that all women are responsible for one woman's supposed transgressions. It doesn't make any difference who it is as long as it is a female. Generic symbol of them lost power, virility and masculinity that they desperately want back.
- ii. Criminals who commit rape see it as an added bonus
- iii. It is a means for assaulters of attaining the unattainable. It allows them to have an undue advantage of a woman or a girl they would never have a chance with. Sex in this sense is the motivating factor.
- iv. For some men, rape is an impersonal experience and preferred over any demonstrated caring or mutual affection. There is no obligation and the power and control are gratifying.
- v. In the heinous and stereotypical form, gang rapist sees rape as recreation and adventures. A gang rapist is seen as "Macho" as male bonding at its height. They generally felt good about what they did.

### **Myths about Sexual Assault**

- i. Benedict (1985) & Burnt (1998) observed that one of the difficult obstacles to control sexual assault especially rape is the abundance of debilitating myths in society. Rape can result in pregnancy or sexually

transmitted diseases. Rapists are aroused by the use of force and violence against victims and such arousal may be heightened by aggressive resistances of victims (Burtz&Spaccarell 1999, Drieschner& Lange 1999, Knight 1999)

iii. Ganas, Sampson, Goztl& Stewart (1999) hypothesized that this myth permeates our society because the myths provide comfort for our social structure. People don't believe that rape occurred. They focus the blame of sexual violence on victims rather than the perpetrators.

Lear (1972) reported that according to police reports, rapes are no more likely to be falsely reported than other crimes. Therefore, to conclude that rapes are likely to be falsely reported is a blatant myth. In the vast majority of instances when women report having been raped just as with children who have been sexually abused, the crime did happen.

iii. Rape is largely motivated by lust, according to Eister (1995). Scully and Marrola (1998) believes that motivation for rape is majorly domination, power, anger, revenge, control, frustration or sadism.

Benedict (1985) Eister (1995) report that some men may come to associate sex with violence, they don't view women as human beings, they see women as object of prey and or domination and view sex as an act of power control and triumph. Thornbull and Palmer (2000) in their work on evolutionary theories of rape suggest that the motives of rapist are primarily sexual and that the exercise of power is said to be mostly a means to an end. This is supported by Sally and Marrola (1998) who found that some of the rapist they interviewed saw it as the only way to get sexual access to women who were unwilling or out of there league.

iv. Rapists are weird and are psychotic loners

The idea that rapists were mentally ill has generated a lot of argument for a long time. Sally and Marrola (1998) observed that the sheer number of rapes makes it statistically impossible that the typical rapist is mentally ill looking at the small number of psychopath men in the population.

v. Victims or survivors of rape provoked the rape or wanted to be raped, so no harm was done.

By acting sexy, wearing sexy clothes or lots of make up, being at a bar and "canning on" to a man walking along a road alone at night shopping late, somehow or other, a woman does something that clearly says " come rape me"

Burt (1998 ) &Ganas et al (1999) &Sussman and Bordwell (1981) have clearly shown that what the survivors does before the rape has little if anything to do with the rapists decision to assault.

vi. Only bad woman are raped

This is one the worst myth about sexual assault . The myth is taken to mean that if the woman has a bad reputation. The rape is justified.

Brownmiller (1975 ) observed that the rape is justified if the person's alleged reputation has nothing to do with whether she deserved to be raped. Burt (1998 ) reported that the stereotypical "damaged goods for example prostitutes are so devalued that they don't have worth at all and therefore can not be raped (Silbert 1988)

vii. Real rapes happen only in bad parts of town at night

This is the myth that holds or takes place in abandoned buildings or lonely fields by strangers who have knives or guns and who engage in brutally beating the victims when they resist heroically even into death. Burt (1998) reported that most rapes occur in either the victims home or the assailant.

### **Conditions that Precipitates Sexual Assault**

Most of the conditions that warrant rape are either through dating or acquaintances. Most of the rapes are in form of sexual assault that takes place in colleges and university campuses. Mild & Granoff (1992) found that 28% of women surveyed acknowledged that they had been victims of rape or attempted rape. Koss (1998) in a national survey of college men and women found that 8.3% of the women that they had been forced to engage in unwanted sex. Only 3.4 % of the men felt they had forced a partner to engage in unwanted sex. Among this only few told anyone about the encounters although those reporting attempted rape were more likely to tell someone than those who had actually been raped. A number of male respondents admitted to continuing to make sexual advances even when their dates had told them 'NO'

Sanders & Moore (1999) reported that date rape survivors in college have been found to be more likely to have experienced stress and maltreatment and negative home neglect during childhood were who reported no date experience. Date rape participants in Sanders and Moore study were also more likely to have experienced sexual abuse during childhood. Such maltreatment was adequately associated with dissociates, depression and other psychological symptoms of trauma.

Alcohol consumption has also been linked to date and acquaintance rape as risk factor (Norms and Cubbins 1972 ) Abbey, McAuslan and Ross (1998) found that college men's mutual effects of belief and experiences with regard to dating sexuality and alcohol consumption increased the likelihood that a male would misperceive a female companion's sexual intentions and that this misperception may lead to sexual assault.

Wilman, Karabatsos and Koss (1990) found that both victim and offender use alcohol prior to attack were directly associated with more severe victimization of woman and that alcohol use play both direct and indirect roles in the outcome of sexual assaults.

Schwartz and Heggelt (1999) found that woman who were sexual assaulted while intoxicated were not less emotionally affected and did not blame themselves any more than women who were sexually assaulted or raped by force while not intoxicated. Most of these women did not classify their expenses as rape, although all were victims under criminal law.

Norris and Cubbins (1992) found that three-fourths of acquaintance rapes involve drinking and that if both members of a dating couple had been consuming alcohol the rape was not judged as severely as when only the woman had been drinking. In this later case the man was likely viewed as taking advantage of a vulnerable woman.

### **Predicament of the Sexually Assaulted or Raped**

The sexually assaulted or raped especially girls or women according to Amir (1971), Benedict (1985) Williams and Holmes (1981) exhibits varieties of reactions when sexually assaulted. The following are the reactions :

- i. Exhibits no emotions appearing unaffected
- ii. Feels humiliated, demand and degrading
- iii. Suffers immediate physical and psychological injury as well as long-term trauma
- iv. Experiences impaired sexual functioning
- v. May blame herself and feel guilty.
- vi. May have difficulty relating to and trusting others especially men.
- vii. May experience fantasies, day dreams and nightmares vividly revolving the assault or additional encounters with the assailant or may have mental image of scenes of revenge.
- viii. Will never be the same even though most survivors over time develop ways to recover , cope and go on with their lives.
- ix. May be fearful of going to the police or rape crisis center.
- x. May be reluctant to discuss with members of her family, friends and others because of the risk of rejection and embarrassment.

### **Intervention and Needs of Sexual Assaulted Survivors**

- i. Needs for medical consultation, advice or treatment . There may be soreness, pain, itching, nausea, insomnia, loss of appetite and other physical and somatic symptoms.
- ii. Experiencing difficulty resuming work. It creates stress in public and work place.
- iii. Need for adequate social networking, a good listener to verbally give her assurances and relationship.
- iv. Needs the acceptance and support of family and friends

v. Difficulty resuming sexual relationship. She needs understanding without pressure Vi. Exhibits mood swings, emotional outbursts, needs acceptance and understanding.

vii. Experiences nightmares, flashbacks, phobia, denial, disbelief and other unusual effects.

viii. She is largely depressed, preoccupied with suicidal ideations or acute traumatic stress disorder.

ix. Sexual assault victims needs adequate empathy and understanding of the closest kins . Needs acceptance, genuineness, care and non judgmental, understanding or unconditional positive regard as positional by Baker (1995), Benedict (1985), Remer & Ferguson (1995)

### **Damages done to Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse**

The effect of sexual abuse or assault on children is perpetual and debilitating throughout life. It is also of considerable concern to the society. If survivors are left unassisted, they experience recurring episodes of revictimisation and exhibits debilitating symptoms for many years. **The following are the effects on adult survivors:**

i. There are symptoms of depression anxiety, shame and humiliation ( Briere&Coute 1993, Briere&Runtz 1988, Browne &Funkelhor 2000, Kessler &Bieschke 1999)

iii. Experience borderline personality disorder, dissociative disorder and post traumatic stress disorder are associated with childhood sexual abuse (Brier &Runtz 1993, McLean & Gallop 2003; Mitchel & Morse 1998 )

iii. Social stigmatization, alienation, inhibitions , introversion and interpersonal hypersensitivity occur (Browne &Funkelhor 2000, Lundberg-Love et al 1992)

iv. More chronic medical conditions ( Browne&Funkelhor 2000, Ullman &Breaklin 2003) , more contacts with medical doctors for somatic complaints and long time physical health deficits emerge (Moeller , Bachmann & Moeller 1993, Stevenson 1999)

v. There are greater incidences of negative self image (Courtois 1988, Herman 1981), poor interpersonal relationships and poor parenting skills (Browne &Funkelhor, 2000 and suicide (Ullmann&Brecklin 2002)

vi. Child sexual abused in adulthood are prone to use of alcohol and drugs to submerge bad memories from awareness as well as engage in suicidal ideation and attempts ( Rew 1989, Ulman&Brecklm 2003)

v. Adult women survivors consistently demonstrate compulsive sexual identity issues and loss of sexual interest ( Briere&Runtz 1987, Courtois 1988, Herman 1981, Funkelhor 1979, Mitchell & Morse 1988)

### **Significance of the Study**

The study could benefit victims, vulnerable girls, parents, teachers, curriculum planners, counsellors, law enforcement agents and professional care givers. The victims could learn how to adjust to the situation. The vulnerable girls could understand how to avoid being assaulted. Parents and teachers could know how to guide their children, wards and students against assaulters. Counsellors could counsel the vulnerable and victims about how to cope and prevent assault. The law enforcement agents could understand the causative factors of assault. The professional care givers could understand how to handle their clients.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that students are to be taught how to avoid sexual assault and how to cope when assault. Curriculum planners should advocate for this in the national curriculum.

Adequate punishment should be meted on rapists to avoid or prevent the mischievousness.

The school counsellors should be trained on how to orientate the girl child about how to resist assault and report assault cases.

### **Research Rationale**

The researcher observed that the prevalence sexual assault of girls in South West Nigeria is very tendentious. There are reports in virtually all the media on daily basis of sexual assaults of girls by family members, relatives, teachers, peers and acquaintances. Despite the fact that there are increasing cases of assaulters meted on offenders, there are still increasing cases of assaults.

Majority of the reported cases of sexual assault even though reported are without encouraging outcome. Parents and guardians of vulnerable children are raising their children with suspicion. The situation is tendentious and alarming to the extent that they are raising their children on suspicion and cannot repose any confidence on anybody or care-givers.

### **Conclusion**

There appears to be adequate indications that majority of girls in South West Nigeria are sexually assaulted. The assaults are meted on hopeless girls at any location. The majority of the rapists even though confessed are not apportioned necessary punishment sequel to the offence committed.

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