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**RAPE CULTURE IN NIGERIA**

Rape is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without that person’s consent. Etymologically, the term *rape* originated the Latin word *rapere* meaning “to snatch, to grab, and to carry off”. Since the 14th century, the term has to mean “to seize and take away by force”. The act may be carried out by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority, or against a person who is incapable of giving valid consent, such as one who is unconscious, incapacitated, has an intellectual disability or is below the legal age of consent. Worldwide, sexual violence, including rape, is primarily committed by makes against females. The effects could be different for every victim, some include: gynecological disorder, reproductive disorder, sexual disorder, infertility, mortality from injuries, suicide, depression, etc.

According to activist Julie Mogbo, “Rape is like cancer, it has no respect for age, sex, or race. It starts from a spot and then gradually spreads”. Nigeria is still very much a patriarchal society: a society where the rules and norms are governed and dictated by men. Rape in its simplest form is the violent expression of power against another. It is not about modesty neither is it about what the person wore or her behavior, cause even modest women get raped. There are numerous cases of rape and gang rape in Nigeria, yet many go unreported. The few that get reported to the authorities are either not pursued by the police or the victim is advised to keep silent in order not to disgrace her family. The prevailing culture of silence facilitated by victim-blaming, slut shaming, and skepticism means that sexual assault victims rarely speak up or come forward to seek help fuels the problem. Nigeria’s culture dictates protecting the family’s image at all cost, so the burden is left for the victim to bear, often causing life-long trauma without any hope for justice.

Nigeria’s rape culture is backed up by religious and cultural sentiments of male supremacy and dominance. In places of worship, females are taught to keep their heads down and their voices low not to ‘distract’ the men. The region mostly affected by this is the north, with only 3% of the females being literate. This cultural and religious context is the underlying reason behind the societal pressure to remain silent and the strong element of shame around rape and rape victims. Spousal rape has absolutely no value at all, as the country’s penal code allows husbands to beat their wives.

Recent events in Nigeria is just another harsh reminder that nowhere is safe in this country, especially for women. In Nigeria, issues such as rape aren’t talked about in public settings, only in private settings. The fight against rape culture isn’t a fight everyone wants to pick, simply because it isn’t easy (but it is necessary). The silences around this topic just proves that many abuses are being ignored. This silence has birthed many NGOs such as Stand to End Rape Initiative {STER} and Women against Rape, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Exploitation {WARSHE} dedicated to fighting the countries rape culture

Recently, women have been speaking out more freely about incidences of rape and sexual assault on social media with the #MeToo movement. Stories of police brutality, gang rape, and even raping in places of worship has been trending these past few weeks. Although this isn’t the first time Nigeria has experienced such an open discussion about the subject, the current happenings in the world has brought out in a whole new light. For many Nigerians, the internet and social media is a key outlet for protests. Nigerians online are demanding justice for the victims. #JusticeForUwa, #JusticeForTina, and #JusticeForJennifer has reverberated among internet users with high profile personalities joining the campaigns. The recent outcry was brought about by the cases of three women and young girls who were raped, with one killed and one passing shortly after. These cases only gained attention after their relatives shared stories and videos with the media. Many believe these incidents showcase the widespread sexual violence and police brutality in Nigeria.

There is a rape epidemic amidst the corona virus pandemic. Nkechi Anazodo, the director of the Anambra state Ministry of Women, children and Social welfare, announced that her department has documented over 80 rape cases despite the pandemic.

The public acknowledges the massive rape problem in Nigeria which is first step to building a responsible society that protects women. Many gender activists argue that the reason this menace has not been taken care of isn’t because of the absence of relevant laws but the weakness in its implementation.

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