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**Rape: Effects Of Rape In Our Society And How It Can Be Prevented**

The rape epidemic is one disease that has ravaged the world for centuries unend, spreading through it little by little like a cancer ruining lives of women, young and old alike. Sadly, this cancer has been allowed to erode the human race, shrugged off as inconsequential and unnecessary. Slowly but steadily it has been ingrained into our very culture, probed and left off to fester without acknowledging how much it has endangered womanhood. WHAT is this CANCER? WHAT is this EVIL?

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. 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 below the legal age of consent. The term rape is sometimes used interchangeably with the term sexual assault.

In many jurisdictions, the crime of rape has been subsumed under that of sexual assault, which also encompasses acts that fall short of intercourse. Rape was long considered to be caused by unbridled sexual desire, but it is now understood as a pathological assertion of power over a victim. The rate of reporting, prosecuting and convicting for rape varies between jurisdictions. Internationally, the incidence of rapes recorded by the police during 2008 ranged, per 100,000 people, from 0.2 in Azerbaijan to 92.9 in Botswana with 6.3 in Lithuania as the median. Worldwide, sexual violence, including rape, is primarily committed by males against females.

Rape by strangers is usually less common than rape by people the victim knows, and male-on-male and female-on-female prison rapes are common and may be least reported forms rape. Rape is also recognised as an element of the crime of genocide when committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a targeted ethnic group. Victims of rape or sexual assault come from a wide range of genders, ages, sexual orientations, ethnicities, geographical locations, cultures and degrees of impairment or disability. Lack of consent is the key definition of rape. Consent is affirmative “informed approval, indicating a freely given agreement”.

Moving on to the effects of rape. The effects of rape can include both the initial physical trauma as well as deep psychological trauma. Although rape victims commonly report injuries and issues with their reproductive health after the sexual assault, rape doesn’t always involve physical force. The most common and lasting effects of rape involve mental health concerns and diminished social confidence. Physical effects of rape can arise from both forced sexual assault and those not involving forcible submission, such as drug- assisted date rape. Forced sexual assault frequently causes visible bruising or bleeding in and around the vaginal or anal area and bruises on other parts of the body from coercive violence.

But both forced and other types of rape can have many physical consequences: painful intercourse( with significant other), urinary infections, uterine fibroids- non cancerous tumors in muscle walls, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases(STD’s)- {HIV, genital warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and others}, bleeding, broken or dislocated bones, difficulty walking. Victims also experience both short and long term psychological effects of rape. One of the most common psychological consequences of rape is self-blame. Victims use self-blame as an avoidance-based coping tool.

Self-blame slows or, in many cases, stops the healing process. Other common emotional and psychological effects of rape include: posttraumatic stress disorder(PTSD)-feelings of severe anxiety and stress, depression, flashbacks- memories of rape as if it is taking place again, borderline personality disorder, sleep disorder, eating disorders, dissociative identity disorder, guilt, distrust of others- uneasy in everyday social situations, anger, feeling of personal powerlessness- victims feel the rapist robbed them of control over their bodies, suicidal thoughts or attempts, fear, disorientation, shock, sense of vulnerability, numbness.

Other circumstances can develop for a survivor after being sexual assaulted or raped. A survivor may develop a negative outlook and feel damaged or unworthy of a better life. Drug and alcohol abuse may also become an issue as a way to cope with the overwhelming feelings. Women may also have trouble with their menstrual cycle and fertility. In addition survivors may experience: chronic fatigue, shortness of breath, muscle tension, involuntary shaking, changes in eating and sleeping patterns, sexual dysfunction. It’s important that victims receive comprehensive care that addresses both the short and long term effects of rape as they become apparent. Studies have shown that rape doesn’t just affect an individual it also affects the individual’s family members and the society at large.

The effect of rape to a community or society will essentially revolve around the response the community makes. In the “First World” or more highly developed countries, community response will commonly be positive and encouraging for the victim. Communities provide emotional support for the victim and help her get over the trauma she has faced. But the scenario is notably different in certain societies like Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and other poor countries where rape victims are neglected or the crime itself is not prioritized, community response would often be in a negative way. It could be either in form of neglect, absence of social and legal justice, and putting the blame on the victim herself. She is often considered as an outcast in the society and is left alone to battle with the aftermath of rape.

Rape is a serious problem that can have lasting, harmful effects on victims and their family, friends, and communities. The goal of sexual violence prevention is to stop it from happening in the first place. The solutions are just as complex as the problem. Preventing sexual violence requires addressing factors at all levels of the social ecology. The government and the society can ensure that rape can be prevented by the following strategies: promoting social norms that protect against violence, teaching skills to prevent sexual violence, providing opportunities to empower and support girls and women, creating protective environments, supporting victims/survivors to lessen harms.

With particular emphasis on Nigeria, the following are measures to prevent rape: public enlightenment has been shown to be a critical tool in changing behaviour, attitude, beliefs and value system of people. Therefore there should be intense public enlightenment and education at schools, social clubs, cultural group gatherings, churches, mosques and through the media. It has been shown that education of children, especially the girl child, goes a long way in boosting the socio-economic and sociocultural status of women in the society. Prevention of rape will remain a mirage until society puts in place institutional framework to deal with cases of rape.

It is my belief that rape can be prevented but there is urgent need for a paradigm shift from the radical feminists ‘movement of the 1970s to expanded prevention efforts which recognize differences based on culture, sexuality, ability and age and gender. Everyone has a role to play in tackling this societal cancer. The fight against rape should be total and there should be no sacred cows in the battle against it. All hands must be on deck to ensure that rape is finally expunged from our society.