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Rape

Rape is the sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without his/her consent. This act may be carried out forcefully, through compulsion, abuse of authority or against a person who is incapable of giving valid consent, such as one who is unconscious, disabled, has intellectual incapacity or is below the legal age of consent.

The term rape originated from the Latin verb rapere which means “to seize or to take by force. It is a forced, unwanted sexual intercourse; it is sometimes called sexual assault, which can happen to both men and women of any age (Medhelp, 2008). Many people believe rape is a sexual act. Although rape involves sexual acts, it is motivated by the desire for power and control over another person, rather than sexual attraction or the desire for sexual gratification. In other words, rape is a crime of violence (Omoera, 2004).

Types of rape

Date rape: the non-consensual sexual activity between people who are already acquainted, friends or even people in an existing romantic relationship

Drug facilitated rape: this occurs when drugs have been used to render the victim unconscious. Hence, making the victim unable to resist.

Stranger rape: it occurs when the rapist assaults the victim on the street with no prior contact. Generally, the victim comes out of nowhere.

Spousal rape: Also known as marital rape, wife rape, husband rape, partner rape, Partner sexual assault (PSA), is rape between married couples. The African culture does not regard a forceful sexual intercourse between a woman and her husband as an act of rape. Research reveals that victims of marital rape suffer long lasting trauma than victims of stranger rape. In many countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, etc. it is impossible to commit the crime of rape against one's wife or husband.

College campus rape: A study carried out indicates a particular problem with Rape on college campuses. Unfortunately, accurate records of sexual violence on campuses in Nigerian higher institutions are not available because most incidents go unreported. And when reported at all, perpetrators go unpunished for fear that it would inflict a permanent social scar on the victim.

Group rape: Also known as gang rape, gang bang etc. It occurs when a group of people participate in the rape of a single victim.

Incest rape: The rape committed by the children's parents or close relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Prison rape: These rapes are virtually always homosexual in nature (since prisons are separated by sex). These acts are mostly committed by people who were not homosexual before their imprisonment.

It is estimated that approximately 35% of women worldwide have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lifetime. In the majority of countries that have data available on rape report that less than 40% of women who experienced sexual violence seek help. Less than 10% seek help from law enforcement.

People who have been raped can be traumatized and develop posttraumatic stress disorder. Serious injuries can result along with the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Some of the consequences of sexual abuse described by the WHO include: Gynecological disorders, reproductive disorders, infertility, depression, sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, Mortality from injuries, increased risk of suicide, unwanted pregnancy.

Victims of rape or sexual assault come from a wide range of genders, ages, sexual orientations, ethnicities, locations, cultures, and degrees of disability. Incidences of rape can be classified into a number of categories and they may describe the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim and context of the sexual assault. These include: date rape, gang rape, marital rape, incestual rape, child sexual abuse, prison rape, acquaintance rape, war rape, and statutory rape and more recently religious rape (Places of worship).

In the UK, there are about 147,000 cases every year and only a thousand plus are convicted. The trend is the same in India, where in every 20 minutes, a case of rape is recorded and only less than 25% of these cases are persecuted. In Lagos state, western Nigeria, about 10,079 cases, which constitute only 18% of the rape that occurred between 2001 and 2005.

It has become a common feature in Nigeria for children, less than twelve years to be victims of sexual assault. Adolescent and young adult women are in high risk range. In Nigeria, even old women are not spared this assault. Now and then, it is reported that a teacher has raped a student, a religious leader has raped his flock, robbers have raped a victim, a master has raped his housemaid etc.

Generally, women have always been dominated and oppressed by men in most cultures in Nigeria. This situation is due to the inequality in gender relations between man and woman. Rape has always been with mankind throughout the world. However, in recent times, the incidence of rape has increased all over the world, Nigeria inclusive.

Rape results in stigmatization of the victim, resulting in rejection by families and communities, and with police unwilling to make official reports. Due to this stigma, women and adolescents may be unwilling or unable to obtain a medical examination to substantiate their report of rape.

The Law on Rape in Nigeria

The Nigerian authorities at both federal and state levels hail to address gender-based violence, including rape. In August 2005, the Federal Government constituted the committee on the review of Discriminatory Laws against Women, which operated under the umbrellas of the National Human Rights Commission with a mandate to review discriminatory legislation including rape.

The general population, government and lawmakers need to understand the epidemic proportions of the crime and its potential long-term impact on the victims. This will help facilitate more structured interventions and preventions in Nigeria.