

**EXPLORING THE MECHANISM OF SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH  
TOWARDS DECRIMINALIZING THE CHALLENGES OF RAPING IN  
NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The paper explored the mechanism of sociological approach towards decriminalizing the challenges of rapping in Nigeria. Rape is a hurdle to economic development, a public health problem, and a violation of women's fundamental human rights. Rape victims tend to be silent as a result of humiliation and intimidation by the police, as well as the "embarrassment" of public acknowledgement. Rape is pervasive in Nigeria and is likely going to worsen if no steps are taken immediately to end this scourge. It is very worrisome that Nigerian females now lose their virginity through rape. The complexity and perplexity of rape in the recent time has been elaborately demonstrated. In an attempt to concretize the occurrence of violence against women and sexual assault against children, selected cases have been reported in order for the stakeholders to take this challenge seriously. However, multifarious challenges are identified as impediments in adequate handling of rape cases in the country especially lack of proper prosecution and mostly the action against the perpetrators of rape used to be contrary to the provision of law in the country. In addition, the study identified a number of consequences emanating from the incidence of rape in the society and of such are sociological, psychological/emotional, health and physical consequences. In order to address the effects of rape on the victims, a number of coping strategies were identified as: Social support, cognitive therapy technique, counselling response. The concluded, the escalation of sexually abusive behaviour called rape cannot be undoubtedly deniable in the country. It was recommended that the government

should establish special task force whose primary responsibility is to implement the anti-rape law especially by receiving the cases of sexual assault, harassment, abuse or rape in the society.

**Keywords:** Approach, Challenges of raping, Decriminalizing, Mechanism, Sociological

## **Introduction**

The word rape appears in dictionaries of several languages. This attests to its existence worldwide. Paradoxically, it is underreported and under prosecuted. It refers to having violent carnal experience by someone without the other person's consent. The culprit is usually a female, occasionally males may be victims (Akinade in UNICEF, 2014). It may be in any form of sexual connection by objects such as penis, finger, sticks or vibrators. Perpetrators cut across cultures, class, creed, country or affiliation. Such individuals include teenage boys who may commit date or acquaintance rape. Group rape may be perpetuated by 'gangs' or 'cliques' - these may include ruffians and armed robbery gangs. There could be public gang rape as in Papua New Guinea that is sanctioned by community leaders. This could be to punish some women who dress or behave immorally (Jerkins in UNICEF, 2014). Rape could be by fathers on their step -or biological daughters; older stepbrothers on young stepsisters; Marital rape may be committed by incompatible couples or cohabiting partners (Esere&Idowu, 2005). Statutory rape (as in some states in United States of America–USA) is sexual intercourse with minors and physically and mentally incapacitated persons. In it, force and lack of consent are not necessary for conviction (Ullman in BBC, 2020).

In Nigeria, there is a feeling that some men have sexual intercourse with mad women for the purpose of making them rich and that masters rape their maids in the absence of their wives or in cases in which their wives cannot bear children for them. In some cases, victims may include female strangers to some big cities. They may be those who cannot find the addresses of people they are out to visit but housed by some male individuals under pretence of assisting them to pass the night in their residence (Omorodion&Olusanya in BBC, 2020). In some instances, lesbian women may insert with sexual intent an index finger into the genitals of unwilling heterosexual females. Also, some devilish maids may do so to the orifice of children under their charge

More so, the incidence of rape involves both child and adult as victims and the various sections of Chapter 21 as contained in Criminal Code declares child abuse as an offence. In a report by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), (2014), it is noted that 25% of girls have actually experience sexual violence prior to the age of 18 as compared with 10% of boys. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, (2014) it is further reiterated that, most children experience sexual violence specifically before the age of 18. It consequently leads or contributes to physical, emotional health dysfunctional as a result of psychological stigma associated with the rape incidence. For instance, there had been a report by Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development that, in Rivers precisely in 2012, there were one thousand two hundred cases of girls who were raped. There are multifarious challenges in handling rape cases because law is not effectively protecting the personality of female children in the society.

Undoubtedly, in the recent time, rape has become so rampant and even child rape is even worst as literature posits (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). As a result of this, there are consequences of rape such as: sociological, psychological/emotional, physical and health consequences. There is insufficient academic research deeply examining the multifarious consequences of sexual harassment especially by chatting new direction in addressing this ugly scenario in the academic environment. It is important to solve this problem because sexual assault is a violation to the ethical standard, moral and cultural values of the society. This study therefore attempts to address the prevalence of rape by examining the mechanism of sociological approach towards decriminalizing the challenges of rapping in Nigeria.

### **Overview of Rape**

It is important to explicate on the term rape and the explication is considered from both etymology and technical explanation of overwhelming literature in order to chat new direction in curbing the prevalence of the crime in Nigeria. Etymologically, the word rape originated from Latin word of “*rapere*” which means to snatch, grab or carry off (Agbo, 2019). This inferably means that rape is forceful snatching of the victims’ virginity and integrity. The forceful sexual engagement leads to psychological and emotional disturbances (Ebigbo in Agbo, 2019). It is not disagreeable to posit that; sex is an integral part of human disposition but it is being

controlled by social norms. Sex is expected to be consensual in nature and it should not be an act of forcefulness.

In other words, there is an existence of social norm and ethical standards in relation with sexual engagement, however, cultural consideration cannot be denied in relation with this which may vary from one cultural attachment to the other (Agbo, 2019). Nevertheless, the differences in culture do not negate atrocious or mischievous behaviour of rape in the society. There are other related terms used in connection with rape which are sexual abuse or sexual harassment. Civilization has not reached the level of legalizing forceful sexual engagement in different parts of the world. Either in developed or developing countries, rape is considered as atrocious act that should be shunned. It is not deniable to assert that rape involves both adult and children but it is more pathetic when it involves children as minors. Literature contends that sexually objectifying media contributes to the increase of tolerance in involving in sexually abusive behavior (Laughnan, 2013; Bernard, 2018).

Any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in the case of a married woman by impersonating her husband, is guilty of an offence, which is called rape. Today however, rape is seen as an act of power or dominance of one person over another. According to Brigneti and Egbonimali in Laughnan (2013), rape is an act of sexual violence that involves intercourse without consent or against someone being unwilling to engage in the act.

The issue of rape cannot be trivialized. It cuts across race, tribe and class. It is a universal phenomenon. And it is endemic. It is an issue that has been subjected to debates by human rights bodies all over the world (Human Right Watch/Africa). Rape is the most gruesome form of violence against women. It is a denial of women's right of self- preservation. It is an intrusion into the right of privacy of the victim. It is a particular kind of human violence which carries powerful meanings in any culture, ancient and modern.

Currently, the prevalence of rape in Nigeria is increasing every day and more pathetically, minors or children are being raped by adult because it is noted that female child cannot make decision on sexual engagement. This is as a result of their psychological state and lack of maturity to understand the need for sex and thus they

become victims of sexual abuse like rape as literature contends (Catholic Diocese of Nsukka in Bernard, 2018). Consensual sexual engagement is not considered as a crime but rape is considered as forceful sexual activity as against the willingness of the second party. Hence, there are cases of rape in the country out of which few cases are explored.

### **Rape as a global concern**

Rape cases are not limited to Nigeria alone. Other countries of the globe have their own side of the story too. A Ugandan court sentenced a teenage girl to a six-hour jail term for killing her rapist father. The 58-year-old man had been raping the daughter repeatedly from the time she was 13 years old. Also, a woman is raped in India every 20 minutes. Statistics show that in North America, there is a high probability of a woman being a victim of sexual assault during her life time. For instance, six men riding in a Bus in New Delhi, Indian's Capital, raped and battered a 23-year-old female medical student and she died as a result of the fatal internal injuries. The death of this Indian rape victim sent shivers around the globe, exposing how the sad trend January 6, 2013). Between 2009/10 and 2011/12 there were an estimated 78,000 victims of rape per year in England and Wales 69,000 females and 9,000 males (Nation Mirror, 2014)

Due to the concerns over women's rights, heralded by the re-emergence of women's movements, sexual assaults and their debilitating consequences for the victims have become one of the pressing and central issues in the last decades. Consequently, many social scientists have turned their attention towards understanding the dynamics of rapists and their motives, the institutional and cultural factors promoting rape, and of course, the various factors affecting the assault on rape victims and their reactions.

To combat the growing number of rapes, more and more people are beginning to think in terms of prevention and not only of ways to deal with the debilitating aftermath of this sexual assault. Only recently, the Lord Bishop of Osun State, Nigeria, Anglican Diocese, Rev Afolabi Popoola, link the increasing cases of rape of minors by men in the state to rituals. Popoola at a news conference in Osogbo, said the church frowns at the rape of minors, especially by men, who are old enough to be their grandfathers. He said rape is an abominable act, which could be linked to ritual practice, all in the quest for material acquisition. He urged law enforcement agents to rise to the challenge by ensuring that offenders face the full wrath of the law. (Punch, March, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

In the same vein, about 400 women marched through the state capital, Osogbo in Osun State, Nigeria, campaigning against rape in the State. Speaking at the occasion, the wife of the State Governor, Mrs. SherifalAregbesola said the campaign was geared towards creating awareness for women to support the eradication of rape in the state since rape has become so rampant in the society. She called on parents to monitor their children and support the state government in her efforts at eradicating rape in the state (Punch, April, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

The Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development, Hajia Zainab Maina, has raised alarm over high incidences of rape and sexual violence against women in Nigeria. She said concerted efforts should be made at ending these crimes which she said had in some cases led to the untimely death of many women and girls. The minister said sexual violence against women was pervasive as evidenced by incidences of rape and other forms of psychological abuse of women and girls across the country and asserted that the trend was unacceptable, as these acts were clearly a violation of the human rights of women (Punch 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2012). Speaking in the same vein, the Executive Secretary of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Professor Ben Angwe, recently urged Nigerians to shun fear and report rape cases to the right authorities. He said the rising cases of rape in the country were at disturbing levels.

Rape, though a global phenomenon, the slow response of the justice system and the lack of supportive institutions to help victims of rape overcome the trauma quickly, have been identified as some of the factors contributing to its rise across the country Nigeria. Many who are raped, suffer humiliations and are sometimes pushed into committing suicide as a result, largely due to the fear of stigmatization.

### **Selected Cases of Rape in Nigeria**

Moreover, it is paramount to explore selected cases of rape in few states in Nigeria with specific selection of cases between 2013 and 2020 in order to be acquainted with the seriousness and escalation of the rape in the society. In 2013, there was reported case of a father who raped his three years old girl which was taken up by the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) (Itoro, 2015). Similarly, in 2013, 24 years old man was arrested for raping 8 years old girl to death in Cross-Rivers State. It should be reiterated that, in Oyo State, a Pastor was arrested for raping 7 years old girl in the church and the accused was arrested in 2015 (Gbemileke & Oladapo, 2015). Furthermore, in 2016, there was a case in Enugu State where a matured adult raped eleven children whose ages were between 3 years



and above. Based on the interrogation of Police with the culprit, it was confirmed that he engaged in such atrocity for monetary ritual purpose. Similarly, in 2016, in Abia State, there was a case where 65 years man was accused of raping two years old girl under his custody and the suspect was arrested without delay (Itoro, 2015). Onwards, in Kaduna State, there was a case of bus conductor who was alleged for raping five years old girl and the culprit had repeatedly raped the children for two years and a medical doctor confirmed penetration into the girl child virginal with serious infection. More so, there was a case of 27 years old man arrested by police for forcefully defiled 2 years old baby. In 2016, there was a case of 6 moth old baby being raped by the husband of the baby's mother's friend in Kano State with the assistance of the culprit's wife. When the man was arrested, he confessed that ritualism has told them to do so in order to get their own baby because they were barren. In 2017, there was a reported case of a father raped his biological child of 8 months old in Ebonyi State and also 16 years old boy also raped 4 months old baby in the same state. Further still, apart from sexual pleasure, it has been confirmed that some people involve in child rape for ritual purpose.

Recent cases of rape have also been confirmed. For instance, it was reported that there are 717 cases of rape within five months specifically between January and May, 2020 in Nigeria (David, 2020). It is reiterated by the police that there were 799 arrested suspects of the rape incidences and the total number of 631 have been painstakingly investigated and charged to the court of law and almost 52 cases are still under investigation (David, 2020). This report is an indication of prevalence and severity of the rape in the country. For instance, in Kano State, according to British Broadcasting Corporation (2020), a man was apprehended by the police after forty people have been raped within the period of one year. As a result of the prevalence and increase in the rate of rape in the country, the activists from Women's Rights Organizations staged a peaceful protest on violence against women. As a result of the reactions and protest, the Nigerian governors have concluded in declaring state of emergency on the incessant cases of rape in the country (Bukola, 2020). Hence, the state governments across the country have concluded to set up a sex offender's register especially in punishing the offenders of rape and violence against women and children in the country (Bukola, 2020). In spite of this effort, there are different challenges of proper handling of rape cases in the country.

## Types of Rape

**Date Rape:** this is a type of rape in which the individuals have agreed on social engagement. The assailant may be an acquaintance or a person one has been dating.

**Power Rape:** power rapist sexuality wants to capture, conquer and control their victims.

**Gang Rape:** this is when a group of people participate in the rape of a single victim.

**Anger or Retaliatory Rape:** it involves expression of hatred and rage towards the victim.

**Sadistic Rape:** This rapist is obsessed and forces the victim to act out a part in some sort of role-play, it could involve mutilation, or torture as a means of getting the rapists excited.

## Causes of Rape Endemic

There are many causes of rape endemic depending on the context by which the scenario of rape is being explored. Literature considers rape as a silent endemic with tendency of HIV infection among the adolescents (Folayan *et al.*, 2014). There are contributing factors to children's rape in Nigeria especially they are at risk of exposing to the incidence of children's rape especially girl-child. Thus, few causes are examined in this paper which is as follows: unemployment and abject poverty, child labour and baby factories and indecent dressing. Each of these is explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

First, unemployment and poverty are the main factors that lead to other social problems or challenges. For instance, as a result of the fact that, high rate of unemployment and abject poverty lead some people in involving in atrocities such as ritualism and cultism in the country (Achunike&Kitaase, 2014). Some ritualizes used to recommend raping of immature children in order to get money or position of affluence in the society. This has led to the increase in case of rape. For instance, there has been a reported case where a perpetrator of rape used to white cloth as a charm on eleven children and these children were sexually harassed in order to for him to get rich. For example, the rape of 6 months old baby in Kano State was mainly for ritual purpose as it shall be explained in detail later.

Second, notably, the existing practice of child labour and prevalence of baby factories immensely contribute to the challenge of child rape in the country. As mentioned earlier that poverty and high level of unemployment lead some parents to make their children vulnerable by partaking in child labour (Alao, 2019). Undoubtedly, it refers to involvement of children in street trading and consequently



increases tendency of being victim of child rape in the country. It is unfortunate that most children partaking in street trading for the purpose of survival in the family tend to appear on the street with all sorts of clothes that expose the shape of their body which attract harassment from others (Agbo, 2019). In other words, indecent dressing such as wearing of leggings, miniskirts among others have been regarded as fundamental reason why rape is prevalent in the society. It is noteworthy to say that most of young girls who are vulnerable to rape used to have a desire to sell their goods and hence, they are being lured by dubious people with an evil mind of committing atrocity of sexual harassment. Child labour is as a result of exposing child to street trading which increases the risk of being vulnerable to sexual harassment while the increase in baby factories is due to the fact that the young girl felt prey into the plot of operators of the baby factories and consequently, the girls are raped for the purpose of procreation (Makinde&Olaleye, 2015). On one hand, the parents are concerned about the means of livelihood because poverty and lack of necessary support to assist the parents financially to take care of their children has significantly contributed to the child rape in the country. On the other hand, the government is concerned about policies and laws that will eradicate child rape totally. For instance, studies conducted in Lagos and Enugu States have demonstrated that in the context of Nigeria, 70% and 83% of victims of child rape were below 18 and 19 years old respectively (Kehinde *et al.*, 2014). There is significant connection between child sexual abuse and child labour which the government needs to address without further delay in order to attain social stability. Third, it is not disagreeable that, indecent dressing contributes significantly to child rape which cannot be underestimated in the country. Most growing and young female children are allowed to dress in clothes that expose their bodies such as tights, nickers, leggings etc. (Agbo, 2019). Different kinds of wears being bought for the children by their parents contribute to the sexual abuse experience among female children (Whatley, 2005). Most parents are careless and they have forgotten that they need to safeguard the dignity of these female children from ugly experience of rape in the society. Most children who are being trained by their parents in dressing loosely tend to behaviour freely with their male counterpart and such may lead to a kind of stereotyped attitudes of sitting uncultured with their male counterpart. Such behaviour will lead to seducing their male counterpart and arouse their sexual urge which consequently lead to rape or sexual harassment. It is therefore important the parents should be enlightened in taking the dress code of their children seriously in

order to avoid unrepeatable psychological and emotional disturbances emanating from the scenario of rape (Eby *et al.*, 1995). Onwards, apart from the foregoing issues, there is another concern where parents show a kind of carelessness. This is due to the fact that, love of luxuries and excessive workload at the office contributes to un-seriousness of some parents in taking good care and safeguarding of their children from the risk of rape. There is no adequate monitoring of the children and consequently they are being exposed to various dangers in the society including rape.

### **Consequences of Rape in the Nigerian Society**

There is no doubt that either child rape or adult rape; it has everlasting negative consequences on the victims and in the society. The consequences may be explicated from different aspects such as sociological, psychological/emotional, health and physical consequences on the victims of the harassment. Each of these is explained in the subsequent paragraphs.

First, pertaining to the sociological consequence of rape, there is negative stigma on both the victims and the perpetrators in the society. For instance, on one hand, there used to be feeling of shame from the victim which consequently will affect her self-image especially in an attempt to get marry. On the other hand, the perpetrator whether convicted by law enforcement agency or not, there used to be a kind of negative stigma on him too and even it will affect his marriage too. More importantly, most people that wish to protect their integrity will not like to associate themselves to the victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse as the society attaches importance to moral and ethical values, since rape is considered as immoral and unethical, it thus negates the moral standard of the society which thereby relegates the victims to low of the lowest. People attach social stigma to the victim of rape and eventually the stigma may remain with the victims for a very long time and as a result of shame, many people may decide not to marry someone with the stigma of rape. More pathetically, the victims of sexual assault used to feel that they are suffering from the loose of their credibility and shame of cyberbullying. Indeed, cyberbullying such as the use of social media (Facebook & WhatsApp) and Internet can damage the image of the victim more than ever before. Also, it can lead to total isolation especially among cultures that attach high sense of stigmatization to the sex and sexuality. Notably, cyberbullying can lead to disowning of the victim by the family and friends especially it can affect the marriage of the victim. Traumatization and shamefulness are a notable frustration resulting from the experience of rape by the victims.

Second, psychological/emotional effect of rape is that, it will cause trauma to the victim and more dangerously affects her self-esteem and consequently leads to emotional imbalance. In addition, there used to be anxiety and fear especially after their traumatic experience of harassment. Literature contends that, most women that experience rape used to feel scared, shivery, or trembling after their rape attack (Branscombe *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, depression and restlessness are symptoms that increase in the victims. More importantly, the victims used to feel mental disorder from the rape which leads to problem of behavioural disorder. It should be reiterated that; the psychological effect is not only restricted to female victims but it also covers male victim of rape (Burt & Demello, 2002). Literature further contends that, men with the experience of rape used to have depression, negative sexual orientation and confusion about their masculinity (Burt & Demello, 2002). In addition, psychiatric disorder is another psychological effect of rape. The fear of informing others about their bitter experience leads to different risk behaviours. More pathetically, survivors of rape used to have suicidal thoughts and can make attempt to commit suicide if adequate care is not provided.

Third, health is another effect of rape and all forms of sexual harassment. As a result of rape, it can lead to anal bleeding and even infection to the victim. Onwards, rape can result to hypoactive sexual desire disorder and even worst it can affect ability of woman to engage in any form of vaginal penetration. More essentially, the consequence of rape is that it can lead to chronic pelvic pain, urinary tract infections, unwanted pregnancy and even HIV/AIDS. The health condition of the victim may be doubted especially it causes fear of fertility and ability to bear children and it thereby leads to total repudiation in marriage.

Fourth, rape or sexual assault has physical consequence. This inferably means that the effect is not only on personal but the closest relatives can also feel the impact. There used to be physical reactions from the victims of rape. Additionally, certain things will change in them such as sleeping and eating patterns. Then, reactionary tendency can be shown and consequently, the victims will be concerned so much about their physical safety. Also, physical injury sustain from the perpetrators will continue lingering in the victim's mind.

### **Challenges of Proper Handling of Rape Cases in Nigeria**

The existence and prevalence of child rape in Nigeria cannot be denied evidently shown with selected cases or severity of the rape. Social media reports several cases and the extent of cases need proactive steps in addressing the

challenges. It must be noted that, the Nigerian Criminal Code of law section 357 of Criminal Code Act, Laws of Federal Republic of Nigeria suggests that rape convicts must be sentenced to life imprisonment and 14 years imprisonment for attempted rape respectively (Agbo, 2019). However, there is no practical implementation of the law despite the fact it is in existence. Nonetheless, there are several challenges militating against adequate measures in curtailing the atrocity of rape and sexual harassment in the society. Thereby, a number of factors militating against proper handling of sexual harassment cases are highlighted as follows: lack of adequate prosecution, lack of adequate protection of female image, soundness of anti-rape law and limited report of rape cases. Each of these factors is explicated in the subsequent paragraphs.

First, the foremost challenge is that, there is lack of adequate prosecution. This is so because, the perpetrators of rape are being arrested by police and few ones are being charged to the court for legal action, but sexual abuse against children and women is not adequately prosecuted in such a way that others would learn to desist from the ugly behaviour in the society (Collett *et al.*, 1998). It has been established that, the Nigerian Senate has consented life imprisonment to the perpetrators of rape of minors or children under 11 years but there has not be proper execution of this law since 2015 until present time (David, 2020). Convictions of the perpetrators of sexual abuse is important in law court and mostly being frustrated by some individuals that act as prosecution and the action being taken against the perpetrators of rape is contrary to the stipulation of laws (Ojoma, 2012). For instance, there is a situation whereby sexual harassment offenders would be asked to carry out community service as a punishment. This is why literature contends that, governmental prosecution of perpetrators of rape should not be encouraged because it does not provide healthy handling of the sexual offences especially that is related to rape (Agbo, 2019).

Second, another problem with lack adequate handling of child rape is that, image of female citizens is not adequately protected under the laws despite the fact that the government has been putting tremendous effort in ensuring social justice in the country (Davies, 2008). In order to establish the factual evidences of the cases of sexual abuse, it requires painstaking requirements such as police and medical reports. Trivialization of the requirements is dangerous to the whole process of prosecuting the culprit and establishing justice in favour of the victims. It must be stressed that, there is need for police and medical reports by victims of parents of

victims before establishing rape cases. It is unfortunate that, in most cases, police may request for undue bribe from the victim prior to the discharge of their primary responsibility of investigating any case being taken to the station. But in a situation whereby the bribe is not given, then the police will establish that the issue is a consensual sexual intercourse. As a result of this, the complainant may be accused. The negative consequence of bribery and corruption further engender injustice where justice is expected to prevail. It is thereby paramount that, efficiency and capacity building of the police is essential in order to promote justice and peace in the society.

Third, the extant literature explicitly examines the soundness of the Nigerian anti-rape law and it was found out the law stipulates that the victim of rape must factually establish the occurrence of penetration and the genuineness of information must prove that the sexual intercourse is not consensual between the victim and the perpetrator (Agbo, 2019). On one hand, it can be argued that, requesting the victim to establish the occurrence of rape will be difficult but this can be justifiably established through medical report from a medical doctor. On the other hand, establishing that sexual engagement is not consensual can only be validated through interrogation and premises of the opinions expressed between the victim and alleged perpetrators. As a result of the issues surrounding the genuineness in establishing the case of rape make it so difficult to probe the perpetrators of rape; hence, there is proliferation in numbers of perpetrators of rape because there is no adequate punishment.

Fourth, there is limited report of cases of rape either by the family or the victims. Literature contends that the reason for limited report of rape case is due to the fear of social stigma and shame. Hence most victims and families tend to hide the sexual harassment or rape. Another important factor with respect to the experience of rape is that, most victims do not like to partake in the rigour of legal procedures and hence, the cases are not being pursued to the reasonable end. As a result of unnecessary silence by the victims, the perpetrators continue with the atrocious act of rape (Davies, 2008). It is on this note the literature posit that, most cases of rape that involve children were not reported as a result of impression that parents wish to protect the future of their wards from shame and social stigma (Agbo, 2019). This unknowingly increases the high rate of the incidence of rape in the Nigerian society. Thus, the consequences of rape are detrimental to the victims and the society at large.

## **Coping Mechanisms of Sociological Approach towards Decriminalizing the Challenges of Raping/Sexual Harassment in Nigeria**

It is undoubted to say that rape and any other form of sexual abuse is a social problem that needs to be proactively addressed. It is therefore important to device or develops coping mechanisms in solving multifarious consequences of rape and sexual harassment. The coping mechanisms explicated in this study are: Social support, cognitive therapy technique, counselling response.

First, one of the essential ways of addressing the trauma of rape is to provide social support especially by galvanizing professional resources. As part of recovery process, it is important to ensure that the victim is not withdrawing from the society as a result of distress (Frazier *et al.*, 2005). The control is an important keyword that assures the victims that they will not experience this again in their life. Hence, both the family and the public are expected to give this support so that it will re-assure the victims to have the sense of belonging rather than isolating from the society (Frese *et al.*, 2004).

A social problem is any condition or behavior that has negative consequences for large numbers of people and that is generally recognized as a condition or behavior that needs to be addressed. The issue of social problem is a complex issue that cannot be addressed haphazardly. Therefore, I shall delicately approach the social problem of rape and sociological solutions.

Sociologists have tried to take a less biased approach with mixed results. Most of the early sociological works on social problems held that a social problem exists when there is a sizable difference between the ideals of a society and its actual achievements. From this perspective, social problems are created by the failure to close the gap between the way people want things to be and the way things really are (Harold R. Kerbo, 2006). Thus, by implication, rape is a social problem because there is no sane society in existence that supports the menace of rape

Second, cognitive therapy technique or cognitive restructuring is considered as a viable remedy or coping strategy in solving the problem of short term and long-term effects of rape. This is found helpful by utilizing facts and experiences in reducing the shame and sense of guilty by the victims. In so doing, they would be made to understand that what happen to them is not their fault and with that, they will feel secured and safe (Branscombe *et al.*, 2003). In overall, the victims need the assistance of others to solve the problem of psychological disturbance by boosting their motivation in seeking care and help in order to overcome the trauma,



aggression, anger, isolation among others (Resick, 2016). Hence, it is essential to help the victims to control themselves from the blame emanating from sexual harassment through the enhancement of the well-being of the victim.

Third, counseling response is considered helpful in minimizing the trauma of rape. More importantly, the victims must be introduced to the psych educational response which is about understanding the rape trauma syndrome as an integral part of recovery strategies from the trauma of rape experience (Marilyn & Lillian, 2001). However, the counselor is expected to guide the victim against both behavioral self-blame and character logical self-blame which are thinking about why she should not have done something else rather than what has happened. Either behavioral or character logical self-blame, it makes the victim to avoid the coping mechanism especially by isolating herself from people that may be of help to her. This is important in order to avoid self-blame which is common with the victims of rape or sexual assault (Wakelin & Long, 2003).

In not shell, based on the foregoing, it can be said that, recovery process has three important key words namely: reaching out to others, reframing the rape and redefining the self will truly be helpful in solving the problem or trauma being experienced from rape incidence as literature posits (Marilyn & Lillian, 2001; Ojoma, 2012). In so doing, the victims will regain their strength from post trauma symptoms of the rape which can only be attained through patience and persistence.

### **Conclusion**

This study has proved that there is violence against women, prevalence of rape and all forms of sexual assault constitute social problem in the context of Nigeria just like in the case of other countries. Various scholarly submissions with regards to the meaning and conceptualization of the term rape as forceful sexual intercourse has been explained. Rape is a hurdle to economic development, a public health problem, and a violation of women's fundamental human rights. Rape victims tend to be silent as a result of humiliation and intimidation by the police, as well as the "embarrassment" of public acknowledgement. Rape is pervasive in Nigeria and is likely going to worsen if no steps are taken immediately to end this scourge. It is very worrisome that Nigerian females now lose their virginity through rape. The complexity and perplexity of rape in the recent time has been elaborately demonstrated. In an attempt to concretize the occurrence of violence against women and sexual assault against children, selected cases have been reported in order for the stakeholders to take this challenge seriously. However, multifarious challenges

are identified as impediments in adequate handling of rape cases in the country especially lack of proper prosecution and mostly the action against the perpetrators of rape used to be contrary to the provision of law in the country. In addition, the study identified a number of consequences emanating from the incidence of rape in the society and of such are sociological, psychological/emotional, health and physical consequences. In order to address the effects of rape on the victims, a number of coping strategies were identified as: Social support, cognitive therapy technique, counselling response. In conclusion, the escalation of sexually abusive behaviour called rape cannot be undoubtedly deniable in the country.

### **Recommendations**

From the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations were made;

- i. The government should establish special task force whose primary responsibility is to implement the anti-rape law especially by receiving the cases of sexual assault, harassment, abuse or rape in the society.
- ii. There should be provision for National Sexual Assault Hotline for complaint of cases whenever victims attempt to seek for justice.
- iii. The sexual harassment law should stipulate the shortest period for the release of medical report in establishing the occurrence of rape.
- iv. The victim of rape should be automatically considered eligible for the collection of sexual assault forensic or rape kit.
- v. That the governors need to collaborate with the police for effective and efficient means in tackling sexual harassment and gender-based violence against women in the country.
- vi. The governors of different states across the country should collaborate with non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International towards initiating policy, capacity building and legal action in combating the severity of sexual assault across the country.

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