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## Sexual Socialization: A Seamless Approach in De-emphasizing Rape Scourge in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Rape, a mammoth epidemic notoriously having its tentacles covering everywhere like a speed of light that travels through cable implanted in a conduit pipe enclosed in an edifice. This scourge has unmasked its ugly face; of no value nakedness and spiteful fang on the nation in no undersized gauge, thereby consuming and reducing her women-folk to nothing but ciphers of humanity even in their own home; their dignity alienated, emotionally and psychologically dehumanized, made to struggle with societal stigmatization and above all, condemned to a lifetime melancholy trauma. It is on this foundation the paper explores how sexual socialization as a strategy could be utilized in stemming the further increase of the scourge and to ensuring a haven for everyone irrespective of gender. A secondary source was adopted for data collection; it also made use of qualitative analysis which invariably led to inferences drawn and coherent conclusion achieved. Findings revealed that the level of enlightenment and strategy towards rape curtailment in Nigerian society has been so low. The paper recommends that parents must be on their guard by ensuring that children receive sound sexual socialization from home fronts. The paper concluded that rape has been a colossal cankerworm rattling the nation.

### INTRODUCTION

Rape is not only considered a destructive crime against victims but also seen as a menace, monster, and nightmare that bedevil the entire female-folk and by extension represents serious malady to the internal workings and social configuration of any society. A shocker to the spine was made public when one of the disheartening experiences of rape scenario in Nigeria was aptly reported in year 2007 by Amnesty International in one of its publications when a rape victim was interviewed as saying: “There were three men, I have pains even today, they used my daughter too, and she is 12 years old. They also raped my sister. Another man raped a woman who was four months pregnant and she lost the child. They were military men. Everyone in the village saw them, they didn’t hide, they didn’t care, I didn’t tell the police

because I feared them” (Amnesty international, 2007).

With few exceptions and in most cases, the victims of rape menace throughout the ages have always been the female folk in many societies. An indicator of this attendant fact is that women have always been seen as the weaker vessel, this has however made them to be easily browbeaten, beleaguered, and subjugated by their opposite sex (male). Hence, it is appropriate to stress that rape is one of the too numerous gender-based violence (suppression of female folk), others being female genital mutilation, domestic violence, deprivation of girl’s education, forced or child marriage etcetera. Though, the last two of this violence are most rampant in the northern part of Nigeria and so many other Africa countries too, thus making it a pandemic phenomenon that has its dreadful mask covering the faces of nearly every society and tying

the hands of every nation against their back, it is better imagined than experienced.

Beyond the metaphorical representation of the scourge, rape cases in Nigeria are fast spreading like what could be compared to a typical Harmattan bush fire ravaging everywhere. According to a bombshell released recently by Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Mrs. Dame Paulen Tallen, while launching the Sex Offenders Register seen as the government's strategy to deal with the issue of rape in the country, argued that "about two million Nigerians (mainly women and girls) are raped every year" (Nextier, 2020). As a result, it has developed into a turbulent, striking, and dramatic occurrence for everyone associated with the realm, the dreadful trend has assumed a niggling dimension lately because the scourge is no longer restricted to a particular age as babies, girls and elderly women are susceptible to this scourge. It therefore becomes very difficult to situate and explain the phenomenon of rape within a certain age paradigm.

Nonetheless, it does not take away anything from the positions of scholars and intellectuals on what rape characterizes. For instance, Chiazor et.al (2016) conceptualized rape to mean the act of forcefully having sex with someone against their will or the act of sexual penetration by one person against another person without the consent of the victim. In a similar vein, Onyejekwe (2008) defined rape as one of the most pervasive forms of violence against women and a crime in which the assailant uses sex to inflict humiliation on the victim or exact power and control over the victim.

Reasoning from the background that the act of rape is never an appetizing experience, it is an unholy and wicked act that causes a variety of traumas such as psychological, mental, emotional, physical dehumanization, and societal stigmatization of victims for crime they do not commit. Though there have been articles and literature trailing the endemic scourge, but as versatile and prolific as most of these scholars appear in their expositions of the scourge, there still exists a

vacuum when it comes to adopting a strategy capable of tackling and curbing the rape scourge headlong in Nigerian society. Therefore, a response in form of sexual socialization of citizens against the scourge could not be more timing than now. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks amongst other things to educate the populace on how sex socialization as a strategy could be amplified to tame the rape scourge in Nigerian society. The trust is however premised on the conviction that a social problem is best tackled at the deep-seated or fundamental stage of the social strata, thereby saving the entire humanity from being infiltrated by the phenomenon on a bothersome range.

## **METHODS**

The methodology adopted was exploratory analytical technique; a secondary source was used for data collection. This was done via library materials, books, journals, magazines, conference papers, periodicals, and other works applicable to the study. Internet resources were also found helpful for the inquiry. The gathered data were critically and thoroughly analyzed which led to an objective conclusion.

The significance of the study draws its strength from the fact that the rape epidemic is one that currently rattles Nigeria as a nation in no small measure. As such, a quagmire that has not witnessed enough enlightenment, education, and sensitization of the citizenry on the maladies the scourge portends for everyone most especially the womenfolk of the society. This study however proves to be a horizon awakening of not only the stakeholders but also everyone in the March and war against this wicked phenomenon. The study is therefore bent on setting the pace and model for researchers; it will as well be of immense value in the hands of policymakers, stakeholders, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) on how best to stem the tide of rape and to a very large extent nipping the phenomenon in the bud, thus, invariably making the society a safe and peaceful one for everyone irrespective of gender.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Clarification of Rape Phenomenon**

Crafting out a clear-cut explanation of the concept of rape is expected to at least be supported by a well-structured, thought out, and sound argument for the phenomenon of this enormity. In tandem with this fundamental requirement, there can hardly be a better starting point or approach to the discourse than the one offered by the Black's Law Dictionary, 9th edition: rape is conceived as: (1) "At common law, unlawful sexual intercourse committed by a man with a woman through force and against her will. The common-law crime of rape required at least a slight penetration of the penis into the vagina". (2) "Unusual sexual activity with a person without consent and usually by force or threat of injury". Going by the above definitions, it could be deduced that it is very much possible for a man to rape his lawful wife in as much as the man applies force or pressure to have his way through and her consent bypassed. Though rape existing between husband and wife may not be recognized as a crime by the Nigerian legal framework (Law), yet such a man who coerces his wife against her wish could still be arraign for assault which would be determined by the degree of force. Still, in a bid to establish a convincing clarity as regards the notion, the Nigerian Criminal Code Act becomes handy and sacrosanct. It espouses rape act as:

A 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 employing threat or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or using false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in the case of married woman, by personating her husband, is guilty of an offense which is called rape (Criminal Code Act, 2004).

In cognizance of thoughts and opinions put forward by scholars towards a robust and intelligibility as regards explanation of rape, it becomes imperative at this juncture to accommodate and highlight some of such insightful thoughts of these scholars. For Chukuma (2013 cited in Omoniyi, 2017:2) rape may involve

unlawful behavior or action such as making a child touch, suck or caress one's private parts to derive sexual pleasure. It should be noted that once the law of love is violated in any lovemaking, even if it is within marriage, it is equally an act tantamount to rape. Chiedu (2012) considered rape as the crime of forcefully having sex with someone against the person's wish. Coming from the insights of these scholars, it is crystal clear that the rape issue cannot be trivialized or swept under the carpet because it affects race, tribe, and class. In a nutshell, it is a global phenomenon, and of course in Nigeria, it is more on the rise lately.

### **Theoretical Base for Rape**

This study scrutinized several theories in a bid to finding a suitable, convincing, and realistic base for the endemic rape scourge in Nigeria and dire resolve to embrace sexual socialization as a tactic in its mitigation. Two theories were found relatively important in this regard. The theories are; self-control theory and social learning theory.

#### **Self-Control Theory (SCT)**

The self-control theory emanated from the works of Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990) labeled low self-control theory which has since been rephrased and popularized as self-control theory. The duo theorists put forward that, given that criminal acts offer instantaneous pleasure, criminals will no doubt choose to engage in them because they are not able to control or defer pleasure (e.g., rape). Also, the proponents argued that committing a crime is simple, thrilling, effortless, and painless to the committer but parenthetically spells pain to the violated which is summed up in an African proverb as, "the axe forgets but the tree remembers". To Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990), individuals with low self-control will be more impulsive, adventurous, self-centered, and have fewer skills, they will be more likely to engage in crime because of its perceived benefits.

Thus, it could be categorically stated that individuals with low self-control are susceptible or strongly prone to committing rape against females in every society and Nigeria inclusive. Because their belief is anchored on the fact that the male sex

drives or urges are uncontrollable, therefore, they are not to be held accountable for their actions. This position rightly explains why there is so much crime of rape in the Nigerian society because more men have low self-control. Also, it is in tandem with the argument of Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990, p. 89) that, men, who have low self-control and are not able to control their sex drive may obtain “sex without courtship” which is also regarded as rape.

#### **Social Learning Theory (SLT)**

The earlier proponents of social learning theory are Julian Rotter, Robert Sears, Walter Mischel, and Ronald Akers. However, Albert Bandura (1977) changed the dynamics through the study of modeling (vicarious learning) as a form of social learning. The major postulation of the theory is that individuals learn some manners through observing, copying, and imitating other people’s behaviors. The social learning theory also holds that positive/negative rewards may influence on the learners. In other words, there can be an encouragement for the learners to replicate the learned behaviors of the role model peradventure the positive rewards outweigh the negative rewards of practicing such socially undesirable behaviors. According to Ellis (1989), social learning of rape is accommodating of the idea that social and cultural learning are fundamentally responsible for rape, owing to the pervasiveness of cultural and societal attitudes that encourage men to sexually exploit women and for women to accept that exploitation.

The foregoing magnificently summarizes the cultural and social outlook of rape and similar crimes in Nigerian. While there have been some punishments for whoever that engaged in the act, yet, it is so glaring that perpetrators of the humanly heinous crime have not been fatally dealt with thereby making others still follow-suit in the practice. Had it been there is commensurable punishment accompanying the commission of such crime, there could have been a significant low level as regards the social learning of others replicating such behaviors.

#### **Articulated Factors Spurring Rape Scourge in Nigerian Society**

The rape scourge in Nigeria cannot be attributed or pin down to a particular factor or cause. In essence, it is caused by many factors. The following factors are adduced as contributing to the startling increase in the number of rape cases in Nigeria in recent times.

#### **Tradition of Silence**

The habits of silence arising from both the victims and the public against the scourge have been partly responsible for the exponential increase in rape cases in Nigerian society. The silence may have been occasioned by the castigation, public embarrassment, and intimidation that await the victims who voiced out their awry and gory experience in the hands of their violator. The law enforcement agencies (Police) that are expected to bring succor to the victims in trying moments like this are even part of those who are bringing untoward humiliation to the victims. Also, the fact that people consider rape as bringing shame and disgrace to the family of such victims unavoidably makes the violated victim silent and by so doing, the perpetrators are meant to walk away scot-free without any punishment which would have deterred the would-be perpetrator from engaging in such dastard act.

#### **Group Influence**

Another cause that is responsible for the occurrence of rape in Nigerian society is the peer association or group influence. The influence peer can have on an individual’s lifestyle is so huge, this informed the proverbial saying that show me your friend and I will tell you the kind of person you are. That is, from the type of traits and characters exhibited by one’s friends, the other person may have the same character. It is said that most youths are led into this act by their peers. It is figured in their desperation to gain approval of their peers and also to be seen as socially belonging to the click, they result into doing all manner of social vices like prostitution, cybercrime (yahoo-yahoo), rape, and others.

### **Indecent Dressing**

One other factor promoting rape in the nation is indecent dressing from the female folk. As a result of modernization and acculturation of other cultures into our system, it has seriously spelled doom for our culture whereby our mode of dressing has long been relegated and theirs get promoted, therefore, the habit of indecent dressing among the youths of nowadays is traceable to the assimilation of such dresses which encourages exposure of various sensitive part of female which ordinarily should have been covered by polite and modest dresses. According to Mofoluwawo and Oyelade (2012), indecent dressing that exposes the erogenous zones of female attracts undue attention from males which do lead to sexual harassment that at times leads to rape. So, indecent dressing to a very large extent could be tantamount to the promotion of the rape scourge in society.

### **Globalization and Civilization**

One of the side effects of globalization is the encouragement of rape in societies. It can be argued that globalization is a consistent force propelling social vices of which rape is notable. This is made possible through the interconnectivity of the world via the acceleration in Information Communication Technology (ICT). For instance, nude pictures, pornographic films, erotic magazines, and sexually graphic music are all being gotten from the internet even at their convenience. So, many of these morally bad habits are cultivated, domesticated, and practice as a result of contact with these heinous materials gotten from the internet.

### **Decline in Moral Values**

It is noticeable nowadays that there is no more regard for cherished values of the past. The relegation of those values has resulted in a disjointed society whereby all manners of vices are perpetrated without recourse for punishment. That is the more reason parents are engaging in an affair with their biological children, pastors running after female members of their Church, lecturers pressurizing their students for sex in exchange for marks. All these are pointer to the decline in moral values in the society.

### **Effects of Rape Scourge on Victims**

It is a popular saying that, there cannot be smoke without fire. The same logic goes with cause and effect. Hence, if there are grounds, then there should be some aftermath effects of such occurrence on the victims in a societal setup. As a result, the following are considered as some out of the notorious effects that rape victims are meant to suffer.

#### **Traumatic Experience**

One notable effect rape victims are subjected to and often meant to grapple within their lifetime, is to suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, shame, depression, and castigation from the rest of the society. According to Ashiru and Orifowomo (2015), rape devastates the lives of victims and their families, causing severe physical and psychological pains and sufferings, including death, sexually transmitted infectious diseases, and unwanted pregnancies.

#### **Shortened Life**

As a telling effect on the violated victims, rape has been discovered to shorten their lives as many of them prefer getting rid out of such disgraceful pregnancies to keeping them. In the process of abortion, most of them could not withstand the rigors and complications therein.

#### **Out of School**

It has been shown that rape victims are at the receiving end of not being able to complete their education, thus, oftentimes the abandonment leads to dropping out of school and rushing into early marriage, unplanned marriage, and outright marriage to the wrong person.

### **Exploring Sexual Socialization in De-emphasizing Rape Scourge**

Before unearthing the strategy as it has to do with substantial de-emphases of rape scourge in the society, it would be indispensably material to have sexuality as the forerunner to the discourse at hand. Sexuality in human anatomy depicts an irrevocably vital element that is intrinsically or inherently linked with the performance and healthy development of people. This significance was further intensified and attested to by a U.S. Surgeon

General, David Satcher (2001), when he stressed that, “sexuality is an integral part of human life,” and sexual health is inextricably bound to both physical and mental health”. Conversely, not taking anything away from its importance to people’s wellbeing and development vis-a-vis physical and mental health, yet, the sexual behaviors of individuals have to be regimented, cultured, and defined within a construct. In other words, if based on sexuality’s importance to people’s health, and as a society, we chose not to care about whose horse was gored, then, it will surely demonstrate the societal invitation to rape and other related sexual harassment.

An answer to the ensuing puzzle is to look in the direction of healthy sexuality or sexual assertiveness. Sexual assertiveness otherwise known as sexual expression could mean the ability to display a convincing sense of self as a sexual being in the purview of conversation. According to Greene & Faulkner (2005), healthy sexuality encompasses an ability to identify one’s sexual needs, wants, and desires and to be able to communicate these to a sexual partner.

However, socialization means the process by which an individual acquires an understanding of ideas, beliefs and values, shared cultural symbols, meanings, and codes of conduct (Schneewind, 2001). Similarly, the Libretxts (2020) as ably supported by California State University, conceptualizes Socialization as implying the inculcation of norms, or behaviors that society marks as valued as opposed to those marked as deviant. It is also construed as a medium through which one learns from society how to express one’s sexuality. As such, sexual expression is part of socialization, the lifelong process of inheriting and disseminating norms, customs, and ideologies and providing an individual with the skills and habits necessary for participating within one’s society (Libretxts, 2020).

Dwelling on the above-established position that, “sexual expression is part of socialization”, one therefore begins to wonder if there exist in actuality a phenomenon (rape, sexual abuse and

harassment,.) one could learn, inculcate and form the basis of one’s behavior without having to navigate through at least one of the various stages or agents of socialization: family, school, religion, peers, media etcetera. This informed Amin (2014: 53) not to express a sui generis opinion that people are socialized about sexually related topics from various sources that likely impact their cognitive framework. Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Ward, (2003 as cited in Vandebosch, 2018:1) maintained that the most significant environmental factors are so-called sexual socialization agents (i.e., parents, peers, and media) that guide adolescents’ development of attitudes, norms, beliefs, and behaviors regarding sexuality.

Therefore, if this assertion remains infallibly valid, then the same socialization could be said to be the tunnel or opium through which the rape scourge and allied abuses against female-folk can be vicariously de-emphasized or inwardly addressed in the society. Emphasizing the significant role played by parents which represents the family and of course the first stage of socialization and how this stage could make or mar the sexual development of a child, depending on whether parents sexually socialized their children constructively or otherwise, Shtarkshall et al (2007) opined that, Sexual socialization of babies and children begins at home, where parents have the opportunity to emphasize their most deeply held values (whether or not these are shared by mainstream society). Giving the argument a robust impetus to make it understandable, they affirmed that:

From a very young age, children are exposed to messages about modesty, nudity, and privacy, including gender-specific messages about proper conduct. Parental responses to infant masturbation, displays of physical affection between parents, and the instruction children receive about appropriate physical contact with other children’s understanding of their sexuality (Shtarkshall et al, 2007).

It is important to understand that sexual socialization is not restricted to the purview of family, but as well extended to other socialization

channels. In that way, vicarious learning and modeling take place outside the home fronts as young and adult study societal values and customs, devour mass media, and participate in cultural and religious activities. Through religion as regards sexual socialization, such teaching that encourages the learning about religious values, which may include views of sexuality as divining ordained and sex as only permitted or occasioned by marriage. On the other hand, media outlets can be very useful in mounting a serious war against the rape scourge in society. Considering the number of people subscribing to mass media outlets like Television, Radio, and social media like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter etcetera. It can be structurally regulated in such a way that programs, music, and films that give rise to the phenomenon are censored.

The idea of having the media unregulated which can be so detrimental and give rise to the rape scourge in the society is brilliantly put into perspective as thus, “the media is one example of a cultural program through which individuals encounter normative discourses of sexuality. Individuals are socialized to replicate the sexual behaviors that they see on television, in movies, and books” (Libretexts, 2020). Beyond that, there is a unique feature common to all the agents of socialization which has to do with the bridge connecting individuals with the larger society. If properly utilize, these bridges (family, peers, religion, media etcetera.) are seamless channels plausible in de-emphasizing the rape scourge in society.

### **CONCLUSION**

The rape scourge has assumed a worrisome dimension in the country. This is directly connected to the fact that both the young and old are nothing but preys in the hands of rapists. In that way, they are subjected to all manners of dehumanizing experience and also made to nurse life-threatening wounds which many of them find difficult to recuperate from throughout their lifetime. Some of these effects had earlier been highlighted to include

psychological and emotional traumas, physical dehumanization, public shame, and stigmatization. Putting all these anomalies done to female-folk in the society into consideration and also what the scourge could spell for unenlightened populace or the entire society as a nucleus. The more reason the study has its topic as “sexual socialization: a seamless approach in de-emphasizing rape scourge in Nigeria”. If well key into, it will no doubt bring the brigandage (rape) to its knees which will invariably ensure a safe and secured society for all to inhabit irrespective of gender affinities.

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