

Barriers to Rape Reporting for Nigerian Women: The Case of female University Students

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Abstract

This article presents the key findings of a research project investigating perceived relevance among barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault for female university students. Existing literature suggests that the refusal of victims of rape and other forms of sexual victimisation in Nigeria to report have social underpinnings. Using qualitative information gathered from in-depth interviews of 23 rape victims, the study found that rather than social stigma, the fear of retaliation by their assailants dominated the concerns of the university rape victims. Other important barriers to rape reporting include lack of confidence in the criminal justice system, social stereotypes and prejudice against victims. Apart from the need for the government and private sector to intervene in the inadequacies of on-campus accommodation of public universities, campus-based rape and sexual assault prevention strategies could also be developed from collaboration among professional counsellors, students, faculty, health centre workers, and campus police.

Introduction

Though rape has been widely acknowledged as one of the most underreported crime in the world (Layman, Gidycz, and Lynn, 1996; Lee, Pomeroy, and Rheinboldt, 2005; Sable, Danis, Mavzy, and Gallagher, 2006), the refusal of victims of rape and other forms of sexual victimisation in Nigeria to report have several social underpinnings. The records of the Nigerian Police are replete with statistics and sometimes names of armed robbers, carjackers and murderers; however, they are largely silent on rape cases. Under the Nigerian law, both the Penal Code and Criminal Code have defined the offence and prescribed punishments. In spite of this, the rate of reporting of rape and sexual assault by victims remains low. Meanwhile, almost on a daily basis, news reports are made of either a teacher raping a pupil, a religious leader raping a member of his flock, robbers raping a victim, a man raping his sister-in-law or daughter-in-law, a group of boys or men raping a lady, a master raping his house maid, a security man raping his master's wife, a boss raping an employee, a father raping his daughter, a young man raping a grandmother, a minor raping a fellow minor, a traditional ruler raping his subject, an 80-year-old man raping an eight-year-old-girl and so on. It is therefore a subject of concern that the statistics on such a crime will be alarmingly unreflective of the perceived rate in the country. Indeed, there is statistical evidence that suggest that most rape in Nigeria goes unpunished, as according to a report by CLEEN Foundation (2013), only 28 per cent of rape cases in the country are reported to the police. Also, in a poll conducted by NOI Polls Limited (2013), it reported that almost 3

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in 10 Nigerians admitted to personally knowing someone who has been a victim of rape. In addition, statistics show that about one in 50 cases of rape are reported, and the percentage of reported cases has continued to reduce over the years despite the consistent increase in the number of incidents (Chiedu, 2013). Consequently, it has been widely described in the country as “a crime whose victims love to remain anonymous” (Yishua, 2011:23).

The peculiarity of the underreporting of rape and sexual violence in Nigeria is underlined by the deficiencies of government to establish structures that would encourage victims to boldly come out. A coalition of civil society groups, in decrying the spate of rape in the country, condemned the law against rape which the Nigerian Constitution portrays as merely a misdemeanour (Ogbo, 2013). Also, unlike what obtains in other countries, stigmatisation is considered as one of the strongest factors inhibiting the reporting of rape, as the Nigerian society are strongly prejudiced against victims (Amaka-Okafor, 2013; Chiedu, 2013). Rape victims are often perceived as facilitating their victimisation through ‘suggestive attitudes,’ and ‘indecent dressing’; in spite of the fact that there is no law that regulates dressing in the country. Therefore, victims of rape or sexual assault are perceived as people of low moral virtues that must have led their assailants to the crime ‘one way or the other’. Amaka-Okafor (2013) described this social perception of rape by Nigerians as part of the ‘culture of rape’. She condemned the non-recognition of domestic rape (between husband and wife) by the nation’s constitution as a factor that fuels the culture of rape in the country. This, by extension may account for the reason for the low reporting of date rape as the female partner will be roundly condemned by the public if she comes out to report being raped by her boyfriend. In this case, it has been reported that even the law enforcement agents makes mockery of such report by victims as they often consider it inconceivable for a girl to report being raped by her boyfriend (Chiedu, 2013). This therefore makes victims to lack the necessary motivation and confidence in the criminal justice system to report such rape incidences. This problem of secondary victimisation has been identified as one of the major factors that account for the underreporting of rape cases in the country (Amaka-Okafor, 2013).

As the rape scourge continues to eat deep into the social fabrics of the country, the ivory towers are not spared as there are increasing accounts of sexual assaults in several institutions of higher learning in the country. The rape situation in higher institutions is even more ominous as they are recoding higher rates of gang rape. Added to this is the growing rate with which videos of the sexual ordeals of the victims are uploaded on social media to further ridicule them the more. One of such instances was a 10-minute uploaded video of rape incidence suffered by a female student by a gang of her fellow students in which she had to beg her assailants to kill her and save her from further gruesome sexual harassment. Gang rape is also very prevalent in many of the nation’s universities as it is used as an expression of abuse and power among cult gangs. Stranger rape is particularly common in non-resident universities as students are left to live off-campus where their security is not in any way guaranteed. The case of rape victimisation among university students was particularly made relevant due to the likelihood of the assailant(s) influencing the reporting behaviour of the victims. Also, apart from stranger rape, date or acquaintance rape is expected to be very prevalent in the universities (Sable et al., 2006), but grossly underreported partly as a result of unacknowledged status of such rape incidences.

The occurrence of rape is a pervasive social problem with lasting effects for victims (Jimenez and Abreu, 2003; Castello, Coomer, Stillwell, and Cate, 2006). McMullin and White (2006) stated that the psychological effects of rape victimisation are even more grave for survivors that are unable to seek or receive support. In spite the worrying dimension of rape and sexual assault as major public health and criminal justice concern in the general population, and in the campuses, there is still a dearth of empirical research conducted on the victimology of rape in Nigeria. This might be a reflection of the negative social perception of the Nigerian public on rape victimisation. Indeed, most of the printed and online resources that dwell on rape and sexual assault as social problems in the country are journalistic in nature. There is no gainsaying about the fact that women and human rights organisations are more actively engaged in the victimology of rape in the country than the academic community. It is imperative for scientific inquiry to be focused on the menace as the journalists’ perspectives are not robust enough to offer in-depth analyses of the situation in the country. Hence, this study sought to expose the knowledge about the perceived impediments to reporting rape

victimisation and to explore the peculiar experiences of students of higher learning, considered to be one of the most vulnerable and high risk population of rape and sexual assault. The focus of this paper is to investigate the perceived relevance among barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault for university female students. How important are potential barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault? What is the level of confidence in the criminal justice system as a mechanism for seeking redress? To what extent does the rape experience of victims influence their decision to reporting rape and sexual assault?

Method

Victimisation survey is considered as important source of reliable information as a basis for understanding and combating crime (Van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit, 2008). This study conducted a qualitative victimisation survey that covered four universities in Lagos and Ogun states, Nigeria. The study designed an In-depth Interview Guide (IDI) that consisted of two sections of ten (10) questions which sought to elicit responses about the participants' perceptions and attitudinal beliefs about rape and sexual assault; the importance of the barriers to reporting, and beliefs about the criminal justice system of the country. In addition, the instrument included a series of questions used to gather social and demographic data. Only female victims of rape and sexual assault were included for this study as the Nigeria Criminal and Penal Code do not recognise male rape in whatever form. Also, the study did not include victims of attempted rape or any form of other sexual assaults that is outside forcible rape. This is not to say that these other sexual violence are permitted in the country, rather it was merely a design to narrow the scope of the research to those that suffered concluded rape incidence. The instrument did not include any published or standardised scales that would have provided benchmarks for reliability and validity. In place of this, peer reviewers that comprised of experts in the field of social work, sexual assault criminology and sexual health officials of the University College Hospital, Ibadan were engaged to examine the face and content validity of the instrument. Their suggestions and comments were duly considered as they were of good value to the study.

In arriving at the respondents of the study, the use of snowball sampling technique was deployed. This is as a result of the peculiar difficulties in accessing and engaging rape survivors in research of this nature especially in socially conservative Nigeria. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study including confidentiality. In all, the study engaged twenty-three (23) female victims that are survivors of rape as students of any of the four universities. The researcher was able to draw his initial sample from students of Tai Solarin University of Education after series of open invitations were made to student victims of rape incidence. From an initial response of three (3) survivors that consented in participating in the study, 20 more respondents were interviewed through face-to-face and telephone interviews. The data collection exercise was conducted between February and June, 2013. The distribution of the respondents in terms of their institutional affiliations shows Tai Solarin University of Education 13 (56.5%) respondents, followed by Olabisi Onabanjo University 6 (26.1%), Lagos State University 3(13.0%) and University of Lagos 1 (4.4%). Though not all the respondents were student as at the time they were interviewed, but all rape experiences shared occurred at the time they were students. Data collected from the field was analysed in order to meet with the research objectives and answer the research questions raised. Information from in-depth interview collected with electronic tapes and notes were transcribed, synthesized and organised under thematic headings using software for qualitative analysis. Significant statements were quoted verbatim in order to corroborate or refute important findings.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

As evident in Table 1, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were quite diverse. The table shows that the respondents are relatively young with majority within age 21-25 (11, 47.83%). It is important to note that majority of the respondents (13, 56.52%) were assaulted at very young age of 16-20. This is followed by those that were slightly older 21-25 (9, 39.13%) at the time of the rape incidence. The fact that the students were raped when relatively very young is likely to have severe psychological and emotional consequence for them. In addition to the youthful status of the survivors when they were raped, they were equally in their early years at the university at the time of the incidence. Twelve (52.17%) of them were in the first year in the university when they were raped, followed by those that suffered rape in the second year (6, 26.09%).

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age (in years)	16-20	3	13.04
	21-25	11	47.83
	26-30	6	26.09
	30+	3	13.04
	Total	23	100
Age (at the time of rape)	16-20	13	56.52
	21-25	9	39.13
	26-30	1	4.35
	30+	Nil	Nil
	Total	23	100
Level in the University (at the time of rape)	100	12	52.17
	200	6	26.09
	300	3	13.04
	400	1	4.35
	500	1	4.35
	Total	23	100
Institutional Affiliation	Tai Solarin University of Ibadan	13	56.52
	Olabisi Onabanjo University	6	26.09
	Lagos State University	3	13.04
	University of Lagos	1	4.35
	Total	23	100

Source: Survey 2013

The fact that most of the respondents were victimised when at their early years in the university may be as a result of their relative inexperience in such environment. In addition, such young and relatively new students will be considered suitable targets for rapists, while they are also likely to fall prey of date or acquaintance rape more due to their inexperience in handling such relationship. The research had more respondents from Tai Solarin University of Education (13, 56.52%) because that was the initial location of the study before it extended to respondents of other universities largely facilitated by the snowballing approach adopted by the researcher.

Perceived Importance of Impediments to Reporting Rape Victimization

Though the respondents were first asked if they reported their assault to the police or school authorities, their response showed that none of them reported the incidence to formal authorities after the incidence. Even 6 (26.09%) of them that initially nursed the idea to report were advised against reporting by their family. Therefore, the research moved to have a clear understanding of the key factors that impedes the reporting of rape incidence to the appropriate authorities. They were requested to mention (as many as applicable to them personally) the key reasons for their inability to report the incidence appropriately. Table 2 shows a list of barriers identified by the respondents of the study that discourage them from seeking justice.

Table 2: Respondents’ perceived importance of impediments to reporting rape and sexual assaults

Impediments to reporting	N	Percentage (%)
Inability to identify assailant	3	13.04
Dislike or distrust of police and justice system	8	34.78
Cultural barriers to obtaining help	7	30.43
Unaware of the need to report	2	8.70
Fear of being stigmatised	18	78.26
Fear of not being believed	9	39.13
Fear of retaliation	21	91.30
Financial dependence on perpetrator	6	26.09
Does not want perpetrator to be prosecuted	5	21.74
No use, harm has already being done	3	13.04
Advised not to report by friends, family, significant others	6	26.09

Source: Survey 2013

As evident from Table 2, the perceived barriers of the university rape victims in reporting their victimisation are quite diverse. However, it is glaring that the fear of retaliation (21, 91.30%) and fear of stigmatisation (18, 78.26%) account for the most perceived importance of barriers to reporting rape and sexual assault. Most of the respondents interviewed stated that they were raped by students that are members of the secret cults. This explains their reluctance to report the case to either the school authority or police force for fear of retaliation of the cultists. One of them who was deflowered by a 3-man gang rape incidence volunteered

...from some of the things they said when broke into my room, I knew they had information from my close friends...they stated that they learnt I was a virgin and they were there to give me a first experience of sex. I was warned not to report otherwise I won't live to regret it. Even my neighbours know some of them but warned me not to report as the consequence might be grave...

(Anne¹, 200 level, Tasued)

The reasons given by most of the respondents that perceives fear of retaliation as an important barrier that disabled them from reporting is not too different from that of Anne. However, the case of Sandra is different. She left her campus (University of Lagos) in company of three female friends to hang out with six men who took them on a boat cruise to an Island within Lagos. On getting to the Island, not only were they were drugged and raped, the orgy was also recorded by the men. They were then warned not to report the incidence to anyone or the video will be uploaded on the internet. She continued:

...they threatened to upload the video on the internet and Bluetooth it to several peoples' phones. I can't bear to have them do that to me so I kept it to myself though they are well

known to me. I would have really loved to report them because they were very brutal with us. They dehumanised us in a way I can't explain. Now I have left them to God to punish them. Even though it happened four years ago, I still live in fear that they may just decide to upload the video because they still have it with them...

(Sandra, 400 level, Unilag)

This result raises objection to the position of most literature that identified fear of stigmatisation as the most perceived barrier to rape reporting in Nigeria (Bachman, 1998; Ayinde, 2008; Ogbe, 2013). This indicates that there are peculiar barriers to rape reporting by college students that are different from what is obtainable in the larger society. However, a significant number of them (18, 78.26%), still fear stigmatisation

...I cannot report because our people don't like to associate with girls that are raped. Even I noticed that as soon as it happened to me, most of my neighbours were no longer free with me. Several times they will be whispering, talking about me, once I approach them, they will stop and start making gestures to themselves. I had to move out of that house because of that...

(Felicia, 200 level, Tasued)

As against the common position of literature that one of the key barriers to reporting rape is not wanting friends and families to know about the rape and sexual assault (Lee, Pomeroy and Rheinboldt, 2005; Sable et al., 2006), 6 (26.09%) were advised by their parents not to report, while 14 (60.87%) of them were convinced by their friends not to take further actions to avoid social stigmatisation. One of the respondents who was raped by a classmate of hers that she was not in any dating relationship with, was stopped by her father from reporting in order to 'protect' the family name

...I called my father as soon as it happened and told him everything. I told him I was going to report the boy to the school authority but he asked me not to go ahead with such plan...he said it would do me more harm than good. When I still insisted after that, he got annoyed and instructed me not to report as it would rub the family name in the mud...

(Faith, 300 level, LASU)

The development of the social media and other communication technologies seems to have opened up new mechanisms for rapists in the country to threaten their victims into concealing the rape events. Added to this is the social prejudice against rape victims that is very pronounced in the country and is important barrier to reporting rape victimisation. In the words of a respondent:

...it is a sorry thing that the people around you are always looking for how to blame you for experiencing such a misfortune. Its either they talk about the way you dressed, something you must have said in public, the way you walk, your looks, or even the way you refused to look...they never look to blame the rapist but it must be the victim that failed to do something right...

(Hannah, 300 level, OOU)

Though the existing literature placed social stigmatisation above threat of retaliation in the level of importance of barriers that affect rape reporting behaviour (Sable et al., 2006), however, the findings of this study indicate otherwise. The research findings suggest there is a difference between the main barrier to reporting rape among students of higher learning and the larger society. This is based on the peculiarity of their academic community, the fear of the ruthless power at the disposal of the cultists as well as the communication technological 'weapons' that can be used to project the tortuous experience of the victims to full public glare. These are the key mechanisms that are used in college environments that make reporting rape almost an impossible task.

The level of confidence in the criminal justice system as a mechanism

Empirical evidence suggests that rape reporting behaviour of women will be enhanced when there is a high level of confidence in the criminal justice system (Starzynski, et al., 2005; Littleton et al., 2006; Sable et al., 2006). Hence, measures to encourage women who suffer rape or sexual assault to come forward to report should obviously commence with appropriate steps to ensure a reliable justice system. This study moved to examine the social perception of the criminal justice system as a mechanism of seeking redress for sexually assaulted women. Since the findings of the study reveals that none of the victims went as far as reporting their assault to the police or school authority, they cannot offer responses that relates to their experience with the country's justice system. Therefore, they were requested to express their general perception of the criminal justice system. Of the 23 respondents, 16 (69.56%) of them stated that their perception of the justice system is based on the experience of people close to them, while the perception of the remaining 7 (30.43%) is based on their knowledge of the general impression of the justice system to the public.

The general perception of the respondents about the justice system of the country is negative. Eighteen (78.26%) of them believe that the justice system of the country cannot effect redress when one's right is trampled upon. Even the 5 (21.74%) of them that believes that redress can be facilitated by justice system holds that one has to be strongly connected or ready to buy the justice. In the words of one of them:

...if you are somebody or you know a person that is somebody in this country, then you can always get justice if you become a victim of a crime. It will be difficult if you are 'a nobody', especially if you are seeking justice against an influential person. Even in a rape case against a person whose father is rich, you will end up coming out guilty...

(Felicia, 200 level, Tasued)

This opinion is shared by the other five respondents that hold the belief that the justice system is still potent. However, for those that feel otherwise, the justice system in the country is non-existent. One of them offers explanation

...we all know that there is no justice in this country, so why will I expose myself to more dangers by reporting such case. The police will make a laughing stock of you as soon as you mention the word 'rape'. A friend of mine that went to report to the police when her boyfriend raped her, she told me that the police on duty told her it's a domestic affair since it's her boyfriend. He told her to go and settle with him, as it is not worth reporting...

(Abigail, 200 level, Lasu)

Another one added:

...even when the police want to help you to get justice, they are not able to do so. It's not about money as there are several rich people that have been killed but their families could not get justice because the police do not have what it takes to catch the assassins. If I go to them to report, what evidence can I present to them for them to believe me? How will they be able to find out the truth? I don't think they are capable to do anything. They will just throw away my case or be asking me just to keep coming without doing anything...

(Annabel, 400 level, OOU)

The account of one of the respondent was more confrontational:

...the police are never interested in what does not benefit them. We all know there is no true justice in this country from the top to the bottom. I will rather leave everything to

God than seek justice that I won't be able to find. Even if the police decide to do the right thing and take the case to court, I will have to spend money that I won't be able to get back for lawyers and all that...so where in reality is my gain in all these?..

(Grace, 300 level, Tasued)

Considering that the findings of the study indicate that fear of retaliation is the most important barrier to rape reporting among university female rape victims, if the criminal justice system of the country is perceived to be reliable, then the rape reporting behaviour of the victims will be more positive. The expression of the respondents on the lack of confidence in the criminal justice system of the country is in tandem with the position of literature on the social perception of the people about the justice system (Adeyemi, 1990; Ugwuonye, 2011). In one of his editorials, the Senior Special Assistant to the Nation's President-Rueben Abati, responded to the rape of a 12 year-old Junior Secondary School (JSS) student of Queens College, Lagos. He stated that the lack of confidence and weakness of the criminal justice system is a strong factor that negatively impacts on the rape reporting tendency of the victims. He mentioned a case of the inadequacies of the justice system

One courageous young lady once took her case to AIT, she reported that when she got to the police station to report that she had just been raped, all the policemen on duty laughed. They didn't take her seriously. She sounded like a married woman who had gone to the police to report that her husband had beaten her. No Nigerian policeman would take such a case seriously. The woman is likely to be asked to go and settle with her husband. It is for this same reason that bigamy is a dead law in our country. Rape is equally difficult to prove in a court of law, the processes and requirements are humiliating for the affected woman.

(Rueben Abati, SSA to the president, 2009)

From the findings of the study and review of existing literature, it is evident that the social perception of rape victims of the criminal justice system is negative and capable of bringing about second victimisation. Due to the perceived secondary victimisation of the police and other agents of justice system in the country, the system is considered as one of the important barriers to rape reporting in the country that needs to be addressed.

The influence of the rape experience of victims on decision to report

Studies have shown that the rape experience of victims can be instrumental to decision to report the assault to appropriate authorities (Lee et al., 2005; McGregor, 2005; Starzynski et al., 2005). Layman et al. (1996) posited that acknowledged rape has a higher tendency of being reported than unacknowledged rape, while Bohner (2005), asserted that victims of coercive rape incidence have a higher tendencies to report. As this is well established in the researches that focused on the larger society, this study moved to examine the efficacy of this theory on the rape reporting behaviour of students of higher institution. Though none of the respondents of the study went as far as reporting the crime to the police, I examined the rape experience of the 6 (26.09%) victims that were motivated to report the incidence before they were persuaded against it by members of their family and friends. They were first requested to state the relationship between them and their assailants at the time of the rape incidence. Table 3 shows the type of rape suffered by the respondents of the study.

Table 3: Types of rape experience of the victims

Rape Types	N	Percentage (%)
Date Rape	3	13.04
Acquaintance Rape	8	34.78
Stranger Rape	12	52.18
Total	23	100

Source: Survey 2013

The table shows that majority of the respondents (12, 52.18%) are victim of stranger rape, followed by those that suffered acquaintance rape (8, 34.78%). The prevalence of stranger rape among the respondents may not be unconnected with the residential status of their institutions. Apart from the University of Lagos, the other selected institutions in the study are non-residential, in which students are expected to arrange for their own accommodation outside the campus. This puts them in a state of insecurity in the community that they reside, with miscreants taking advantage of the situation to molest the students. This is particularly the case in Ijagun and Ijebu-Igbo areas that accommodates Tasued and OOU students respectively. Furthermore, the study requested the victims to describe the nature of their rape experience; Table 4 shows a variety of their experience.

Table 4: The nature of the rape experience of the victims

Nature of rape event	N	Percentage (%)
Single rapist, minimal physical assault, no use of weapon	7	30.44
Single rapist, severe physical assault, use of weapon	3	13.04
Gang rape, minimal physical assault, no use of weapon	5	21.74
Gang rape, severe physical assault, use of weapon	8	34.78
Total	23	

Source: Survey 2013

The pattern of rape experience of the victim (from the table above) shows that those suffered violent rape are more than those whose physical assault was mild. The position of this research is that gang rape cannot be visited on a victim with ‘minimal physical assault’. Therefore, unlike the position of some of the respondents (5, 21.74%) that perceived that they had a ‘non-violent’ gang rape, I categorised them under violent rape. Consequently, a total of 16 (69.57) of the respondents were victims of violent rape. Upon further scrutiny, it was found that the victims that indicated that they had a non-violent gang rape made their choice of response based on their submission to the threat of the assaulters to accept being sexually assaulted, which made them to escape being beaten up.

In respect of the six victims that initially wanted to report their assault to the law enforcement agents, three of them fell into the category of those that were raped by single assailant who inflicted severe injuries on them with the use of weapons, while the other three were gang raped with severe injuries. It is noteworthy to state that all the six were raped by acquaintances that they were not dating. There are some similarities in the reason they gave for taking the decision to report. The sense of betrayal of trust, and physical assault that resulted in body injuries which made some of them to seek for medical help were common features of their rape experience. One of them gave details of her experience and what informed her decision to go to the police:

...being in the same group with him for a certain assignment, it was normal for us to meet and work together. On the fateful day, he called me to inform me that other members of our group were already at his place. I got there to find out that there was no one with him, he invited me in, then started saying things that I initially thought was a joke...how he loves me and all that...he was dating another classmate of mine that I know, so I never expected him to want to do this. I got up to leave when he was becoming insistent but he pulled me back and pushed me to his bed with a strong force. My head hit the wall in the process and I became semi-unconscious. I was helpless as a result of the effect of the impact of the hit on my head. He had his way with me and was laughing scornfully as I struggled to make my way out of his room...

(Faith, 300 level, LASU)

It was observed by the researcher that Faith felt strong emotion of betrayal and shame as a result of the incidence due to the level of trust she reposed in her assailant as a boyfriend of her colleague. The physical assault that she was also subjected to must have sparked off the decision to report. In the case of Hannah who was a victim of gang rape:

...he asked me out, he wanted to date me but I refused because I was dating another person who is not a student. He seemed to have accepted and agreed that we could be friends. I have nothing against that so I accepted...the day it happened, we were both on our way home from school when he invited me to branch at his place to have a drink before continuing my journey. I never suspected anything so I entered his room. He gave me a cup of water which I drank then we started chatting about different school life. I can't remember at what point I slept off, I woke up to see him pulling my dress off, I struggled weakly because I couldn't get a grip of myself. He was hitting me as he was removing my dress, I must have fainted at some point because I never knew when his friends came him. I only woke up to realise that four of them had slept with me. I was a virgin until that day, I was in my first year...I felt dead...

(Angelina, 400 level, Tasued)

The key semblances in the case of those that wanted to report include shock at being raped by unexpected assailant, the brutal manner that the rape happened, the fact that the assailant was known (unlike stranger rape), there was no video recording or other forms of threat, and they were all raped by people they will continue to have contact with. These are the key similarities in the rape experiences of those that took the decisions to report their assault to the police before they were persuaded against taking such action.

Discussion

Historically, the barriers to reporting crimes of rape and sexual assault have included personal shame, concern for privacy, distrust of criminal justice proceedings and fear of perpetrator retaliation (Wiche and Richards, 1995; Bachman, 1998; Sable et al., 2006). The findings of the study suggest that there is a significant difference between the barriers that are applicable to victims within the larger society and those victimised in the university environment. The universities are communities of their own that possess a different system of interactions of their own that may not necessarily conform to what is obtainable in the larger society. Rather than social stigma, the fear of retaliation by their assailants has dominated the concerns of the victims. The failure to report a rape or sexual assault can result from the fear nursed about the consequence of doing such as most of the perpetrators are perceived to be members of the secret cults (campus-based gangs) even when there is no evidence to support this perception. This is a departure from the submissions of most of the literature that have largely focused their research on the larger society.

The reporting behaviour of campus rape victims are equally influenced by the stereotypes that the society has about seductive and vindictive women. These stereotypes are often used by defence attorneys to prejudice the juries against victims, resulting in a reduced chance of prosecution and conviction (O'Toole and Schiffman, 1997; Shepherd, 2002). This position aligns with victim precipitation theory which argues that there are victims who actually initiated the confrontation that led to their assault (Wolfgang, 1958). The idea that precipitation theory proposed has been the main manner with which the criminal justice system treated women who are victims of rape. A rape victim is often treated as though she must have 'encouraged or enabled' the man that raped her in one way or the other, hence, she must have provoked the attack, as a result, a reduced sentence should be passed on the offender. This may explain the reason for the refusal of the parents and friends of a good number of the victims to allow the case to be officially reported to the law enforcement officers.

Though, this is a universal phenomenon, however, the social conservatism and prejudice against rape victimisation in Nigeria is strong enough to inhibit survivors from reporting in order to avoid social scorn and cynicism. This research supports literature that projects fear of social stigma as a potent barrier to rape reporting behaviour of women (Gartner and MacMillan, 1995; Shepherd, 2002). The linkage between fear of retaliation and social stigmatisation lies in the prevailing use of

video recording materials (such as mobile phones, camera etc.) to record the rape event, thereby threatening to make the video recording public if the victim dare to report the incidence. Since the victims do not expect to get appreciable social sympathy if the video is made public, she will likely keep quiet to save herself from further embarrassment and stigmatisation.

The lack of adequate confidence in the criminal justice system of the country also proves to be a very important barrier to rape reporting by women in the country. The findings of this research clearly indicate that victims of rape would rather seek redress through spiritual means than report their rape and sexual assault to the police. This is largely based on the negative experience of people close to them with the police in time past. This findings support the literature that has identified the growing lack of confidence in the criminal justice system as a bane to crime reporting in the country (Adeyemi, 1990; Ugwuonye, 2011). The attitude of the police towards rape as an offence is highly reflective of the overall perception of the crime in the larger society. The findings of the study corroborates available literature (Abati, 2009; Ogbo, 2013) that police officers are often prejudiced in their treatment of rape cases. In addition, the problem of the burden of proof that falls on the victims is another barrier to reporting crime as the Nigerian Police have not attained the level of forensic technology that would enable them determine the victimisation of rape and sexual assault without making victims to go through unnecessary rigours.

The findings of this study also raises objection to existing literature that posits that rape offenders are often known to the victims (Gartner and MacMillian, 1995; Fisher, Cullen and Turner, 2000; Rennison 2000; Shepherd, 2002), as stranger rape accounts for the most prevalent rape type in the study areas of the research. This is mainly due to the residential conditions of the universities included in the study which is largely off-campus. The insecure nature of the neighbourhood that accommodates the students makes them highly vulnerable to such sexual assaults. However, the study aligns with the literature that holds that victims will be more predisposed to report rape when the offender betrays trust than in date or stranger rape scenario (Gartner and MacMillian, 1995). The study found acquaintance rape when violence is involved, either by single or gang offenders, as more deserving to report. This might be due to the psychological effects that may follow such betray of trust and problems in dealing with a 'friend's' betrayal.

From the foregoing, it could be argued that there is some measure of peculiarities that pertains to rape reporting behaviour of college victims in Nigeria as against what is obtainable in the larger society. This position implies that there must be specific approaches designed to encourage crime reporting among college students in the country that will be different from the ones used for the general populace in order to evolve positive response. The study also argues that the development of the social media and other communication technologies are gradually reshaping the important barriers to rape reporting in the country.

Conclusion

The negative attitude towards rape reporting as revealed in this study portends an ominous situation to crime control in Nigeria. Although there have been great strides in the movement toward assisting victims of sexual assault, victims still face multiple barriers when coming forward to report victimisation. There are a number of reasons to encourage survivors of rape or sexual assault to report. The major benefit for the society would be to increase the consequence of the crime, which might result in preventing rape or sexual assault. Meanwhile, what the survivor stand to benefit may be an increased opportunity to receive the medical and psychological first aid to assist in recovering from an event with significant psychological and physical trauma. Without doubt, there is need for timely institutional intervention that would bring about positive attitude towards crime reporting in the country. The results of this study indicate a need for education about the cultural influences on rape and rape reporting. The efforts to dispel the existing myth about rape and its causes must be made in order for the stereotypes against the victims to be reconsidered. In order for such education to be effective, the Nigerian populace needs to be incorporated for them to appreciate rape as crime of violence, rather than as a sexual expression. This education should include comprehensive information about levels of intense violence in our society.

The findings of this study indicate the need for the criminal justice system of the country to be revamped in such a way that it will become more effective in treating rape cases. It is suggested that the police should establish an Anti-Sexual Assault unit within its ranks to specially attend to rape cases. This unit should be adequately equipped with necessary forensic technologies to aid its investigations. This will enable the courts to possess more incontrovertible evidences to prosecute rape cases. There is no gain saying about the fact that if the justice system is more receptive to victims, it will positively impact on rape reporting behaviour and reduce sexual violence victimisation.

The outcome of this research draws attention to the need for government to intervene in the problem of on-campus accommodation needs of the universities of the country. Safety of students cannot be guaranteed outside their campuses hence, the need for government to prioritise accommodation provisions to higher institutions in the country. At the colleges and universities' level, education should be strengthened and integrated with messages against cultism, gangsterism, drug and alcohol use which are contributing factors in rape and sexual assault. Furthermore, campus-based rape and sexual assault prevention strategies could be developed from collaboration among professional counsellors, students, faculty, health centre workers, and campus police. These partners could review local rape statistics and formulate policy specifically designed to make the campus a safe place to learn. Through the coordination of the efforts of interested campus-based organisations, date rape could be reduced.

Finally, this study has been able to reveal the importance of barriers to reporting rape. However, a careful design of treatment and intervention modalities, mindful of the persistent attitudinal barriers to their use, may help diminish barriers to reporting the crime of rape. This study has consciously underlined the need for the development of a more informed and proactive approach for our public education efforts. I am advising that more research in this arena should be considered to inform prevention and intervention policy, therefore making sure that victims of this crime receive the most sensitive and protective treatment that can be offered. In addition, further research should be conducted to identify the participants' preferred methods of education and which educational interventions will be most effective in reducing these barriers. I conclude that research into the perceived importance of barriers to reporting is an important agenda that would help to drive reforms in rape treatment in Nigeria and cover the gap in the literature on the victimology of rape in the country.

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Endnotes

ⁱ All names used to refer to the clients of rehabilitation are fictitious and are only meant to represent the real persons interviewed at the centres.