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Recurring Cases of Child Rape in Nigeria: An Issue for Church Intervention

ABSTRACT: In Nigerian society, there has been an upsurge in incidents of child rape and, to a large extent, the girl child is no longer safe. It is, therefore, that this paper – using the qualitative approach, literature review, and interview methods – examined what should be the Church responsibilities in addressing the matter. It is noted in the newspaper that number of reported cases are only a tip of the iceberg. Many are never reported, because parents would want to shield their daughters from embarrassment of the society stigmatization, or possibly the victims are threatened verbally or physically by the abusers. However, the newspaper also noted that the Bible speaks forcefully against sexual exploitation. Throughout Scripture, sexual relations are portrayed as holy, ordained of God at the time of creation, not to be indulged in frivolously, and certainly not to involve violent trampling of the rights and dignity of the female. However, rape is an endemic reality in Biblical time. The work noted that the Church need to admit that child rape happens. So the paper recommended that the Church has the responsibilities of finding healings for the victims of child rape through pastoral, theological, and ministry of support. Then, given the society we live in, the Church owes its members an educational program that facilitates awareness of rape and its personal, psychological, sociological, legal, and moral consequences.

KEY WORD: Rape; Girl Child; Church Responsibility; Abusers; Victims.

ABSTRAKSI: “Kasus-kasus Perkosaan Anak yang Berulang di Nigeria: Suatu Isu untuk Intervensi Gereja”. Dalam masyarakat Nigeria, telah terjadi peningkatan dalam kasus pemerkosaan anak dan, sebagian besar, anak perempuan tidak lagi aman. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini – menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, tinjauan literatur, dan metode wawancara – meneliti apa yang seharusnya menjadi tanggung jawab Gereja dalam menangani masalah tersebut. Tercatat di koran bahwa jumlah kasus yang dilaporkan hanyalah puncak gunung es. Banyak yang tidak pernah dilaporkan, karena orang tua ingin melindungi anak perempuan mereka dari rasa malu terhadap stigmatisasi masyarakat, atau mungkin para korban diancam secara verbal atau fisik oleh para pelaku pemerkosaan. Namun, surat kabar itu juga mencatat bahwa Alkitab berbicara dengan tegas menentang eksploitasi seksual. Di seluruh Alkitab, hubungan seksual digambarkan sebagai kudus, ditabiskan oleh Tuhan pada saat penciptaan, tidak untuk dimanjakan dengan sembrono, dan tentu saja tidak melibatkan kekerasan menginjak-injak hak-hak dan martabat perempuan. Namun, pemerkosaan adalah realitas endemik di zaman Alkitab. Pekerjaan itu mencatat bahwa Gereja perlu mengakui pemerkosaan anak terjadi. Makalah ini merekomendasikan bahwa Gereja memiliki tanggung jawab untuk menemukan penyembuhan bagi para korban perkosaan anak melalui pelayanan pastoral, teologis, dan dukungan pelayanan. Kemudian, mengingat masyarakat tempat kita tinggal, Gereja berutang kepada para jemaahnya sebuah program pendidikan yang memfasilitasi kesadaran akan perkosaan dan konsekuensinya secara pribadi, psikologis, sosiologis, hukum, dan moral.

KATA KUNCI: Pemerkosaan; Anak Perempuan; Tanggungjawab Gereja; Pelaku Kekerasan; Korban.

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INTRODUCTION

Child rape is gradually becoming a common phenomenon across the globe and in Nigeria in particular. It occurs at alarming rate that it can no longer be swept aside as a trivial matter. It is pathetic to note that child rape is not always the act of stranger, often time the abuser is a family member, a trusted family friend, or a child care provider. Child rape is the ultimate expression of sex abuse (Schwartz-Kennedy, 2001:20; Eze, 2013; and Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018).

It is an act of violence and humiliation, overwhelming fear for her very existence and an equally overwhelmingly sense of powerlessness and helplessness. This fear and helplessness are made even more threatening by the complex process of reporting a rape. More alarming is the fact that in spite of the stringent penalty for rape, it still thrives because of bottlenecks of legal technicalities and unwillingness of victims to pursue their cases to logical conclusions (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013; Hoyle, Speechley & Burnett, 2016; and Haskell & Randall, 2019).

To some extent, rape reflects the ambivalence, moral decadence, ethical, and bankruptcy that have characterized Nigerians over the years. There is no age limit regarding rape as children, babies, adolescents, matured adults, and grandmothers and women over seventy years are being raped or defiled recklessly. Rape, generally speaking, is infringements on the rights of individuals, particularly children, and could amount to gross violation of child rights (Sarah, 2011:228; David *et al.*, 2018; and Okundare & Agbo, 2019).

Meanwhile, in recent times, the Nigerian media has reported the frequency

of child rape cases in various parts of the country. The survey done by the CLEEN (Centre for Law Enforcement Education) Foundation can provide a glimpse of the enormity of the problem. With 10 percent incident of rape or attempted rape, the South-South region took the inglorious title of having the highest rape cases, followed by the North-East – 6 per cent, while the South-West region and North-West regions had statistics of one in every 25 women – four percent each. The North-Central followed with three per cent – one in every 33 women polled; while the South-East had the lowest incidence rate of one in every 100 women. Interestingly, most of the victims – 36 per cent – told CLEEN Foundation, they were raped near their homes (Aborisade, 2014; Utoo, Ilora & Utoo, 2018; and Victor, Chika & Innocent, 2019).¹

This ugly trend reported in the media, and social media, does not depicts the true statistics on rape as most victims do not have their cases reported to the police and, therefore, the rapist go scot Free (Thacker, 2017; Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2018; and Morabito, Williams & Pattavina, 2019). The key question, then, is could it be that the society is tilting towards the Biblical Sodom and Gomorra, where morality has been thrown to the dust bin? Why is child rape on the increase in Nigeria, what steps should be taken by the Church as an agent of morality to curb this social anomaly?

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to raise the awareness of our denomination to child sexual rape. The hope is that victims will recognize that

¹See also, for example, “The CLEEN Foundation: 2013”. Available online at: www.cleen.org [accessed in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: December 1, 2019].

the Church will believe them and assist in their healing, and that offenders will get additional support in their treatment. Finally, the hope is that through preventive teaching, the incidence can be decreased. So, by using the qualitative approach, literature review, and interview methods (Aitken & Herman, 2009; Bowen, 2009; and Mohajan, 2018), this article tries to elaborate as well as analysis descriptively pertaining: (1) *What is Child Rape? Context in which Rape Happens and Biblical Perspective on Sexual Relationship*; (2) *How Common is Child Rape*; (3) *Deducible Facts from the Survey: Causes and Effects*; and (4) *Experiences of Some Victims and Church's Responsibilities*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What is Child Rape? Context in which Rape Happens and Biblical Perspective on Sexual Relationship. Although rape can be defined as sex without consent, it is best understood as a crime of aggression rather than sex, because the focus is on hurting and dominating rather than on sexual desire. More specifically, it is the penetration of any bodily orifice by a penis or object without consent (Shaw & Lee, 2001:399; Buchhandler-Raphael, 2011; and Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2018).

Child rape in this context, therefore, means having sex with a minor, when somebody close to one's age, or an adult man or woman, penetrated one's mouth, vagina, or anus with a penis, finger, tongue, or object (Oberman, 1994-1995; Glosser, Gardiner & Fishman, 2004; and Felt, 2014:428).

Child rape can happen in any context. It could be in the making of child sexual abuse images and films, or in one-on-one settings by a parent or other relative, family friend, Church leader, babysitter,

or in fewer cases, strangers. It is a heartbreaking truth that children may be made available by their own parents for rape by other adults. Offenders are usually male – though by no means exclusively – and one study specifically about child-rape found that non-related but known perpetrators, such as family friends, comprise the largest group of offenders (Benjamin *et al.*, 1999:193; Crosson-Tower, 2008; and Zimring, 2009).

The Bible speaks forcefully against sexual exploitation. Throughout Scripture, sexual relations are portrayed as holy, ordained of God at the time of Creation, not to be indulged frivolously, and certainly not to involve violent trampling of the rights and dignity of the marriage partner. The Seventh Commandment is not simply a prohibition of adultery; it is a divine commission governing sexual relationships (Kennedy, 1995; Krämer & Vellguth eds., 2015; and Olusola & Temitope, 2019b).

Directives uplifting this model relationship abound in the Old Testament. According to Deut, 22:13-29, that a man who seduced a woman was required to marry her. Deut, 22:22 and 24, also stated that to have sexual relations with an engaged or married woman was a capital offense. Ex, 22:16 and 17, stated that seducing an unengaged girl was a crime. Lev, 19:29, stated that incest was prohibited. Many Old Testament stories – as stated in Gen, 34:2; Sam, 11:12-14, 13:14-33 and 16; and Judges, 20:5ff – illustrate the intense rage expressed against rapists (cited in Bell *et al.* eds., 1992; Kennedy, 1995; and Boer, 2014).

In spite of the penalties on rapist, there are still stories of rape in the Biblical time. Examples are the story of Dinah,

the daughter of Jacob, who was raped by Shechem, as stated in Genesis, 34:1-31 (cited in Bechtel, 1994; Meyers ed., 2000; and Olusola & Temitope, 2019b). The rape of Tamar by his brother, Amnon, is reported in 2nd Samuel, 13:1-22. This is what Tribble Phyllis (1984) tagged “*the royal rape of wisdom*” (Phyllis, 1984:37). The story of the unnamed woman in Judges, 19:1-30, is one of betrayal, torture, rape, and account of female helplessness as interpreted by the feminist. She was not only raped, but killed (*cf* Phyllis, 1984:65; Alalade, 2012; and MacCammon, 2018).

Although the New Testament does not speak specifically about rape, Christ’s teaching on adultery defines for us the high road of sexual relationships. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus defined adultery not just as an act, but as a thought that precedes the act. “*Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully*”, said Jesus as cited in Matt, 5:28, NIV, “*has already committed adultery with her in his heart*”. This pronouncement affirms the highest value and dignity of a human being and precludes the passions and lust that motivate rape (cited in Namitondo, 2014; Nieuwhof, 2015; and Olusola & Temitope, 2019b).

Consider also how Jesus dealt with the woman caught in adultery, as stated in John, 8:2-11. He turned the table on the men, who likely were responsible for her act. Jesus focused on the thoughts of men toward that woman rather than on her actions or the accusation against her (cited in Manus & Ukaga, 2017; Hill, 2019; and Olusola & Temitope, 2019b). As James B. Hurley (1981) pointed out as following here:

It is not the presence of a woman, but the sinful thoughts of a man towards her, what make the situation dangerous (Hurley, 1981:17).

From the above references, it could be said that rape is one of the most traumatizing forms of violence against children. It is even more damaging, when carried out by a person in a position of power or somebody a child is entrusted to (Marge ed., 2003; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005; and Pinheiro, 2018).

How Common is Child Rape. Globally, the prevalence of child sexual abuse is difficult to determine, because it is often not reported; and experts agree that the incidence is far greater than what is reported to authorities. Child rape is also not uniformly defined, so statistics may vary (McCann, 2017; Kelly & Karsna, 2018; and Lalor & McElvaney, 2018).

According to a 2009 study published in *Clinical Psychology Review* that examined 65 studies from 22 countries, as cited in J. Herman (2012) that:

The global prevalence of child sexual abuse has been estimated at 19.7% for females and 7.9% for males, using the available data, the highest prevalence rate of child sexual abuse geographically was found in Africa (34.4%). Most sexual abuse offenders are noted to be acquainted with their victims; approximately 30% are relatives of the child, most often brothers, fathers, uncles or cousins; around 60% are other acquaintances such as “friends” of the family, babysitters, or neighbors; strangers are the offenders in approximately 10% of child sexual abuse cases (Herman, 2012:202).

Statistics below represent some of the research done on child sexual abuse. The research of Saunders Benjamin *et al.* (1999), and other scholars, told us the following: 85 women in 1,000 were raped at least once as a minor, with the average age for a first rape being 10.8 years; 21.5% of rapes occur between birth and age 7; 38.3% of rapes occur between the ages of 7 and 12 years; and 40.2% of rapes occurred between the ages of 13 and

17 years (*cf* Benjamin *et al.*, 1999:187; Greathouse *et al.*, 2015; and Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2018).

Equally, studies by David Finkelhor (1994 and 2008), a Director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center, showed that: 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse; Self-report studies show that 20% of adult females and 5-10% of adult males recall a childhood sexual assault or sexual abuse incident; During a one-year period in the USA (United States of America), 16% of youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually victimized; Over the course of their lifetime, 28% of USA youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually victimized; and Children who are most vulnerable to CSA (Child Sexual Abuse) between the ages of 7 and 13 (*cf* Finkelhor, 1994 and 2008; Douglas & Finkelhor, 2005; and Simon *et al.*, 2018).

However, in Nigeria, the growing rate of reported rape cases of minors in is becoming alarming. What is more dreadful and unacceptable is that those involved in these criminal activities are usually treated with levity, whenever they were arrested by the law enforcement agents. This disposition must change if we are ever going to deal with a situation that puts the lives and future of many of our children at great physical, emotional, and psychological risk (Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2018; and Morabito, Williams & Pattavina, 2019).

In 2004 witnessed the reportage of child rape cases in Kano State; in 2005, further, witnessed an increment in reported child rape cases that escalated to an alarming rate in 2007. Furthermore, within two months in 2008, over a hundred cases involving underage victims

were reported to the Police authority prompting an alarm raised by the Police authority about the steady and noticeable increment in the overall number of reported child rape cases in the state (Weimann, 2010; Alwis ed., 2018; and Okafor-Udah, 2019).

In Lagos, Nigeria, the Lagos State Police Command revealed that the command had recorded 678 cases of rape between March 2012 and March 2013; and with an undisclosed number of the victims being underage. Meanwhile, in recent times, the Nigerian media has reported the increased frequency of child rape cases in various parts of the country (Weimann, 2010; Chiazor *et al.*, 2016; and Okafor-Udah, 2019).²

Therefore, for clarity purpose while preparing for this article, a survey poll was conducted to ask eight specific questions, which borders on frequency of child rape, age categories of the victims involved, whether rape cases were ever reported, categories of people who usually raped minors, and what could be done to solve the problem via a vis Church's responsibility regarding this issue (Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2018; Kilpatrick, 2018; and Mahoney & Williams, 2018).

Question 1: "*In your opinion, how prevalent is the issue of child rape in Nigeria (rape of persons below 18 years)?*". The findings reveal that the overall majority (67% = 35% + 32%) think that child rape is prevalent in Nigeria, while 19% are of the view that it is somewhat prevalent. In addition, 14% of the respondents surveyed indicated that it is not prevalent at all

²See again, for example, "The CLEEN Foundation: 2013". Available online at: www.cleen.org [accessed in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: December 1, 2019].

(Folayan *et al.*, 2014; Elias *et al.*, 2015; and Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018).³

Question 2: In order to ascertain the proportion of those that actually know victims of child rape, respondents were asked, “*Do you personally know of any child that has been a victim of child rape in your locality?*”. The result shows that slightly more than 3 in 10 of the respondents (31%) personally know victims of child rape in their locality. On the other hand, 69% of the respondents claimed that they do not know of any victim of child rape in their locality (Kamdar *et al.*, 2017; David *et al.*, 2018; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Question 3: “*What age category did the victim fall under?*”. The majority (49%) stated that the victims they knew were between 7-12 years old. This is followed by 26% of respondents that knew victims aged between 13-17 years, while 19% knew victims that were less than 6 years old. Apart from the underage victims, 6% of the respondents indicated the victims they knew were above the age of 18 years (Owen, 2017; Berat & Demirovski, 2019; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Question 4: “*Do you know if the child rape case was reported?*”. In response to this question, the majority (67%) claimed that the incident was reported, while 21% claimed it was not reported. In addition, 12% of the respondents indicated that they didn't know if the incidence was reported or not (Felson & Paré, 2005; Hammond, 2016; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Question 5: Respondents who confirmed that the rape case was reported were further asked, “*Who was the incidence*

reported to?”. The outcome discloses that the majority of respondents indicated that the child rape was reported to the Police (78%), followed by 9% who said it was reported to a parent/guardian. In addition, another 3% each said the child rape case was reported to religious institution and non-governmental organizations (*cf* Krol, Kabashi & Bala, 2017; Morabito, Williams & Pattavina, 2019; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Question 6: All respondents were asked, “*Which category of persons would you consider as the most offenders of child rape in Nigeria?*”. The findings show that the slight majority (36%) consider “close family relatives” to most often be the offenders involved in child rape in Nigeria. This is followed by 33% of respondents that think it is “Home neighbor” and “strangers” (28%); “House help/Nannies” (25%); and “Family friends” (20%). Furthermore, 16% say is perpetrated by “unemployed people”; whereas 4% blamed it on other factors (Eze, 2013; Folayan *et al.*, 2014; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Question 7: “*What punishment do you think is befitting for child rapists in Nigeria?*”. Majority of respondents (65%) think that prison sentences of 14 years should be the penalty for offenders, whereas 17% feel that the death penalty should be the punishment, and 11% think they should be in rehabilitative custody (*cf* Abubakar, 2010-2011; Zeman *ed.*, 2017; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Question 8: “*In your own words, what should be done to eradicate the incidence of child rape in Nigeria?*” Around 30% of Nigerians believe that “enforcing severe punishment” would help eradicate child rape in Nigeria. This is followed by “Good parental upbringing” as much as 21%;

³See, for example, “Child Rape Cases on the Rise in Nigeria” in *NOIPolls*, on July 15, 2014. Available online also at: <https://noi-polls.com/child-rape-cases-on-the-rise-in-nigeria/> [accessed in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: April 21, 2019].

“Public enlightenment campaign” as much as 16%; “Education on moral values and sex education by Church” as much as 11%; and “Job creation” as much as 8% (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018; Utoo, Ilori & Utoo, 2018; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

Deducible Facts from the Survey: Causes and Effects. Firstly, current poll results have revealed that majority of Nigerians affirm there is a high prevalence of child rape in Nigeria, and only few know victims of child rape in their localities (Pius *et al.*, 2015; David *et al.*, 2018; and Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018).

Secondly, majority of those that personally know victims of child rape claim the victims are aged between 7-12 years (Piper *et al.*, 1997; Zinzow *et al.*, 2012; and Finkelhor *et al.*, 2014).

Thirdly, sexual offenders of children come from all sectors of society are intelligent and are most often between 35 and 40 (though grandfathers have been apprehended). They are not the “crazed sex perverts one might expect” as noted by R.E. Butman (1983) and other scholars, but were often physically and/or sexually abused themselves [...] almost always unreported (*cf* Groth, 1979; Butman, 1983:20-23; and Varga *ed.*, 2012). By outward appearances, the majority are good providers, the religious heads of their homes, active in their Church, and hard working. Internally, one finds persons who were themselves emotionally deprived by their fathers (Butman, 1983; Watts, 2017; dan Adams, 2018).

Fourthly, rapes were not reported but some will be afraid of the stigma, so they stay back and prefer settling with the man and let him off the hook. This does not help in prosecuting the suspect. Reporting needs to happen for several reasons: (1)

the long term effects of not reporting and, thus, not receiving help may be devastating to all involved; and (2) other children, both in and out of the home, may be at risk, reporting makes treatment available to the offender, the spouse, and the child (Boatman, Borkan & Schetky, 1981; Bennice & Ressick, 2003; and Villines, 2018).

Fifthly, it is important to note that legal practitioners had previously argued that weak legal sanctions and enforcement in rape cases is one of the reasons why there is a low rate of rape prosecution cases in Nigeria. It is not just practical to ensure maximum punishment, it is imperative that local law enforcement authorities enforce this punishment in a firm and decisive manner (Folayan *et al.*, 2014; Adekoya, 2018; and Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018).

Given the foregoing statistics, the crucial questions are: “*Why is child rape on the increase in Nigeria?*” and “*What should be done to control this social malaise?*”.

Some identifiable causes of child rape as given by D.O. Akintunde (2002); Dorcas Omolere Olanrenwaju (2013); and other scholars include: anti-social and borderline personalities irresponsibility. This is enhanced by drugs and alcohol, lust in men who have not disciplined their impulses, misogyny, that is men who hate girls or women commit violent crimes against them, men with poor self-worth are convinced that no woman would voluntarily sleep with them, revenge, money ritual or curing of sexually transmitted disease, bad company poor parental background, peer influence societal decadence, and the likes (Akintunde, 2002:61; Candito, 2003; Olanrenwaju, 2013:243; and DiSanto, 2016).

Meanwhile, the effects of child sexual abuse on male and female children and adult survivors are well-documented. We know about sexual dysfunction, poor self-esteem, and more. The effects of child-rape in particular do not differ entirely from those of child sexual assault in general. However, research did reveal some particular areas of impact in child rape: Jeffrey N. Epstein, Benjamin E. Saunders & Dean G. Kilpatrick (1997), and other scholars, tell us specific acts of childhood sexual abuse appear to increase the risk of developing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Epstein, Saunders & Kilpatrick, 1997; Susan, 2014:236; and Stemple & Meyer, 2014).

The PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) is a condition experienced by many people who have experienced traumatic events, which were perceived as life-threatening and over which they had no control. It has two stages. The first is disorganization, due to the shock of rape. Fight, anger, guilt, and shame may follow. Reorganization is the second stage, which gradually takes place over a period of 3-4 months. Sometimes, it may take much longer. The victim's feels vulnerable, timid, and not fully in control of her life. Such a child may be chronically frightened of things that remind you of the childhood rape, and may experience nightmares about it, or flashbacks (Benjamin *et al.*, 1999; Kolk, 2000; and Bryant, 2019). In this context, Saunders Benjamin *et al.* (1999) stated as following here:

*Conversely, such a child may feel very numb about it all. At particularly bad times, you may have body-memories – or pain in your body (vagina, anus, jaws, or elsewhere) that corresponds with the pain caused by the abuse. Also, survivors of child rape are also more to have higher levels of substance abuse and depression issues and sexual dysfunctions (Benjamin *et al.*, 1999:192).*

Experiences of Some Victims and Church's Responsibilities. Here, we just want to have a glimpse into the experiences of a few victims of child rape in our society. Interview with Respondent A had stated as following here:

[...] my daughter told me everything her father has been doing to her with a strict warning that she should not tell anybody (Interview with Respondent A, 3/7/2019).

Amidst sobs, Respondent B narrated her experience as following here:

The first night was painful and when the pain was much and I was crying profusely, my father went to a nearby chemist shop to buy me some pain relievers and toiletries for my use. He spared me for two days before he resumed and each time he wanted to do it, I was always in pain. That was when I told my mother's friend. My father almost killed me for taking such a step (Interview with Respondent B, 10/7/2019).

Both parents had gone out in search of means of livelihood, leaving their kids in the hands of their neighbors. It was that the couple usually left home very early leaving their three kids, two boys and a girl in care of their neighbors, whose environment is surrounded with miscreants, who are always loitering around the neighborhood. The miscreants took advantage of the parents' absence, and sneaked into the house had sex with the little girl while the other children were playing outside (*cf* Purefoy, 2010; Ellison, 2018; and Interview with Respondent C, 17/7/2019).

When the father who came earlier saw her daughter, he found his daughter in an extremely calm situation, forcing him to ask her what was amiss. Upon more interrogation, she pointed to her private part, saying "this place is paining me". At

this point, the mother was said to have arrived from her daily routine and both examined their daughter's private part and discovered semen and blood all over her. They both pleaded with the little girl to tell them what happened with a view to identifying the culprit (*cf* Neale & Lopez, 2017; Hillman, 2019; Interview with Respondent A, 3/7/2019; and Interview with Respondent D, 24/7/2019).

The accused lured the victims to the back of the Church and assaulted her sexually, adding that while he was carrying out his nefarious act, the victim screamed for help to the hearing of a passerby who rescued the girl from the accused (*cf* Eze, 2013; Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018; Interview with Respondent A, 3/7/2019; Interview with Respondent B, 10/7/2019; Interview with Respondent C, 17/7/2019; and Interview with Respondent D, 24/7/2019). The big question that still remains unanswered is: "*What could have attracted any sane person to the extent of raping a three-year-old girl?*"

These experiences seem fictional, but they are not. The writers had cause to experience the case of a young girl raped in her neighborhood years back. However, we need to note that some of the cases were not reported to the Police, probably because the children may be threatened verbally or physically. Others may think they are the only ones in such a predicament, are lack of faith in the judicial system, or fear of repercussions to the aggressor (Breines, Connell & Eide, 2000; Kalra & Bhugra, 2013; and Olusola & Temitope, 2019b).

Meanwhile, clinical psychologists noted that the silence of the victims may be as a result of fear of stigmatization by the society or psychological problem. But, it

needs be noted that whatever might be the case, the trauma suffered by the victims cannot be restituted. The punishment for rape, as spelt out in Section 358 of the Criminal Code, is life imprisonment, while an attempt to commit rape attracts 14 years imprisonment (Castille & Barry, 2012; Fadare, 2014; and Manni & Babbage, 2018).

In spite of the stringent penalty for rape, it still thrives because of bottlenecks of legal technicalities, and unwillingness of victims to pursue their cases to logical conclusions (Akinadea, Adewuyib & Sulaiman, 2010; Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018; and Akinwole & Omoera, 2019).

An important thing that the Church need to admit is that child rape happens and that it happens among its own members. The absence of not preaching and teaching on these matters has played, and is playing, a substantial role in the mess we now have in our society. If the Church does not address these issues by giving Biblical instruction, warning, and direction, they are ignoring aspects of the teaching of the Word of God and a great area of need in our culture (Eze, 2013; Kiaira, 2016; and Cahill & Wilkinson, 2017).

Be that as it may, a five-fold Church response to this sobering problem would seem appropriate at this juncture:

The first response of the Church must be that of awareness. Conduct educational program in rape awareness. Given the society we live in, the Church owes its members, particularly the girl child, an educational program that facilitates awareness of rape and its personal, psychological, sociological, legal, and moral consequences. Rape generates tremendous traumatic reactions for victims and their families. The Church can guide

them to available support systems. Rape is not a subject for jokes. The violation of a person's most precious right is not to be taken lightly, nor should it evoke condemnation of the victim (Eze, 2013; Nwabueze & Oduah, 2018; and Akinwale & Omoera, 2019).

The second response must be educational: the Church must help raise consciousness, so that more persons can step forward to find healing. The Church needs to offer educational programme as the most human and Christian's way to combat ignorance, prejudice, fear, and promiscuous behavior. Two key components of such education are prevention and response. Churches must seek the advice, counsel, and training of child protection experts to assist in developing a "culture of protection" (APJN, 2008; Herstad, 2009; and Je'adayibe, 2016).

Responding with excellence to abuse disclosures should always involve reporting the alleged crime to law enforcement, as well as demonstrating affirmation and support to the child, who has come forward. Such an environment will make it much more likely that a victim will come forward, the abuse will stop, and the perpetrator will face justice (Eze, 2013; Okafor-Udah, 2019; and Radford, Allnock & Hynes, 2019).

The third response must be pastoral. We do not deny the fact that child rape is one of the nastiest and most terrifying wounds to bear. Some might have contracted sexual transmitted diseases in the process that generate more shame and trauma. But, this provides the Church with no possible justification for shunning or neglecting them. Jesus, as stated in Mark, 10:14, was clear about the importance of

children: "*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these*". If we truly embrace this verse, we will do everything possible to protect and bless these little ones (*cf* Liebling, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2014; and Cahill & Wilkinson, 2017).

The fourth response is to provide a ministry of support. Catching and punishing the rapist may be the objective of law enforcement, but that hardly restores the dignity and personhood of the victim. Rape victims need empathy and a sense of control over what has happened to them. The Church has the responsibility and the capacity to assist victims in dealing with hospitals, law enforcement agencies, and perhaps the media. The Church can also find help and healing in crises of confidence and self-worth that victims of violent crimes frequently experience long after the event, but remain unable to recognize them as such (*cf* Erinkveld, 2016; Moyo & Lahai, 2018; and Evans, 2019).

Above all, the fifth, the victim of child rape must be reminded that forgiveness is important in the healing process of the wound created by rape and it requires great patience. It was not helpful for a victim of five years of abuse to hear from the Pastor, "*You're a Christian! You should have been able to forgive by now. Forgive and forget*". Victims will tell you that it is not that easy, even with a lot of prayer. Instead, the pastor/counselor would do well to remind the victim that God loves unconditionally, that He will assume her guilt if the father won't, and that we, as representatives of the Kingdom, will help bear the burden until it is lifted. Therefore for total healing, there should be a place for forgiveness (Shipman, 2016; Feuerbacher, 2019; and Olusola &

Temitope, 2019b).

Child rape constitutes a grave abuse of rights and must by all means be discouraged. Protecting children must be a high priority for the Church. Jesus welcomed little children to His side, as stated in Mark, 10:14; and had harsh words for anyone who would cause a child to stumble, as stated in Matthew, 18:6, as follows:

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea (cited in Olusola & Temitope, 2019b).

Equally the Church leaders, as shepherds, are commissioned to stand watch over their flocks and that means having our eyes open to all the dangers that can attack our children. Also there is need for improvements in the socio-economic status of Nigerians, so that parents can cater for their children without handling them over to foster parents or relatives for training (Akinadea, Adewuyib & Sulaiman, 2010; Dada, 2016; and Olusola & Temitope, 2019a).

Why would a parent send her daughter of six or nine years old child from the East to Lagos to go and work as house help and her parent still get money over such a child? A child that is supposed to be in the school, it is a pathetic situation. When there is strong parental support, a girl-child will have a sense of security and belonging. They will have confidence to express their fears and anxieties. Parents should encourage their children to report to them incidents like touching even if it is father, brother, or relatives. Girls should be made aware of dangers lurking in society (Mohd & Amuda, 2011; David *et al.*, 2018; and Edeh, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The Bible speaks forcefully against sexual exploitation. Throughout Scripture, sexual relations are portrayed as holy, ordained of God at the time of creation, not to be indulged in frivolously, and certainly not to involve violent trampling of the rights and dignity of the female. However, rape is an endemic reality in Biblical time. The work noted that the Church need to admit that child rape happens and that it happens among its own members.

The paper recommended that the Church has the responsibilities of finding healings for the victims of child rape through pastoral, theological, and ministry of support. Then, given the society we live in, the Church owes its members an educational program that facilitates awareness of rape and its personal, psychological, sociological, legal, and moral consequences.⁴

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⁴**Statement:** We, the undersigned, state that this article is our original work. It is not the result of plagiarism, because the sources we referenced and quoted are actually listed in full in the Bibliography or References. We are ready to be sanctioned academically, if what we declare is, it turns out that in the future, violating the applicable rules.

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