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Sir,

## A review of incidents of rape from police records in Ibadan, Nigeria

### Introduction

Sexual coercion is a serious public health problem in many countries of the world. Sexual coercion is the use of force or the attempt to force another individual through violence, threats, verbal insistence, deception, cultural expectations, and economic circumstances to engage in any sexual activity against his or her will. Sexual coercion is a continuum of behaviours ranging from unwanted touch, verbal intimidation, rape, to cultural expectations that require girls to marry and have sexual intercourse with men against their will [1]. Although sexual coercion affects both genders, women are more likely than men to be victims of coercion [2-3].

Coerced sex is of public health concern not only because it reinforces women's subordination to men but also due to its devastating impact on the reproductive health of victims [1]. Concern about coercive sex has heightened in recent years because of its association with HIV infection [4]. Forced sex is linked with HIV infection in three ways. Firstly, coercive sex directly increases a woman's risk for HIV through resulting physical trauma [5-6] which creates a pathway for HIV to enter a woman's body during sex with an infected person. A study from Rwanda found that women who had experienced forced sex were significantly more likely to be infected with HIV than those who had not [5]. Secondly, use of violence and threat of violence in sexual relationships undermine a woman's ability to negotiate safe-sex with the perpetrator of sexual coercion. Finally, women who have been victims of sexual abuse during childhood have greater propensity to participate in risky sexual activities as adolescents or adults thereby increasing their chance of infection with HIV [6].

Rape is the most severe form of sexual coercion and it is a criminal offence in many countries, including Nigeria where convicted perpetrators are liable to suffer long jail terms. There are three sexual-related offences in the Nigerian laws, namely rape, attempt to rape, and defilement. Rape and the attempt to rape are punishable by life imprisonment and 14 years imprisonment for convicted perpetrators respectively. Defilement is sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 13 years, an offence also punishable by life imprisonment [7]. Despite the existence of these laws victims of rape seldom seek judicial redress [8].

Until recently few studies in Nigeria have investigated rape because of the sensitivity associated with it. The few available surveys on rape have focused mainly on young persons and found prevalence ranging from 4% among female apprentices [9], 4.4% in secondary school students [10], to 6% in young female hawkers working in

bus and truck stations in urban areas [8]. Recent studies are beginning to show that young males are also vulnerable to rape and other forms of coercion [6]. One qualitative study explored the consequences of rape and health seeking behaviour through in-depth interviews of victims [11]. An earlier study by Orubuloye and colleagues [12] found that 15% of 467 female hawkers lost their virginity to rape perpetrated by commercial drivers. Omorodion and Olusanya reviewed case notes of rape victims in Benin City and categorised rape common in female adolescents into three types: domestic rape, gang rape and classical rape perpetrated by unknown assailants [13].

Although these studies have improved the understanding of rape and related problems among young persons, not enough attention has so far been paid to collection of data on rape from crime records. Yet, it is important to collect data on rape from this source because crime records yield information on judicial investigations and outcomes of rape cases that are often difficult to collect in surveys. Few published studies are available on rape from crime records [14]. This pilot study reviews records of rape cases reported by victims to the Nigeria Police in Ibadan, Nigeria in 2002.

### Materials and methods

Official approval for the study was received from the Oyo State Commissioner of Police. An in-depth interview was held with the police officer in charge of sex-related offences at the Oyo State Police Command revealed that there are 22 divisional police stations in the city and that the rape cases reported in each station are sent monthly to the Management Service Department (MSD) at the state headquarters where they are entered into Crimes Returns Ledger (CRL) for collation. It was also found that the details about each case are available in the case file developed by the police for each victim at the stations.

Seventeen (77%) of the 22 divisions reported at least one case of rape in 2002 when the study was conducted. A questionnaire was used to extract relevant information from each case including demographic profile of victims and the perpetrator, the person who reported the case (whether or not it was reported by parents or the victims herself), the circumstance leading to the rape and the scene of the crime. The names of victims were not documented to protect their privacy. Although the information in the CRL at the MSD showed that a total of 124 cases of rape were reported from 17 police divisions, records were available for review for only 37 (29.8%) of victims. The records of 87 were not available for review because some were missing or in the custody of police officers responsible for investigation who had been transferred outside Ibadan.

### Results

#### *Profile of rape victims*

All the victims were females whose ages ranged from 6 to

35 years with a mean of 15.8 (SD 5.61). Almost all (83.8%) the women had never been married (Table 1). Concerning schooling, the women had mainly primary (35.1%) and secondary school (37.8%) education. The majority (67.6%) were pupils or students and Christianity was the dominant religion (56.5%).

**Table 1:** Profile of rape victims in Ibadan in one year (n=17)

Item	No.	%
<i>Age</i>		
5-9	6	16.2
10-14	8	21.6
15-19	16	43.3
20 and above	7	18.9
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single (never married)	31	83.8
Married	2	5.4
NA	4	10.8
<i>Educational status</i>		
Primary	13	35.1
Secondary	14	37.8
NA	10	27.1
<i>Occupation</i>		
Pupil/student	25	67.6
Apprentice	5	13.5
Others*	7	18.9
<i>Religion</i>		
Christian	21	56.5
Moslem	16	43.5

\*Others are hawkerts, trade, civil servant, waitress and sex worker

### Context of rape

All the incidents of rape were perpetrated by males including acquaintances (32.5%), strangers (21.6%) and neighbours (16.1%) of the victims (Table 2). More than half (54.1%) of the incident of rape occurred in the homes of the perpetrators, 21.6% took place in the victims' home and 13.5% took place along the roadside. Thirty-five percent of the victims were raped by more than one person and the number of perpetrators involved in the gang rape ranged from 2-3. With respect to health seeking behaviour, a large majority (78.4%) sought care following the incident of rape, 22.6% did not. Among those who did, victims reportedly received care mainly from a private hospital, general or teaching hospital. About 10% of the victims had a prior history of rape. The police terminated its investigation and prosecution of 56.8% cases because parents and guardians of victims requested them to do so. Investigation and trial of 16% of offenders had been concluded in which perpetrators had been jailed, while the trial of 13.5% of perpetrators had been suspended because they had reportedly absconded.

**Table 2:** Context of rape in one years in Ibadan, Nigeria (n=17)

Item	No.	%
<i>Perpetrator</i>		
Neighbour	6	16.2
Acquaintance	12	32.5
Family friend	2	5.4
Stranger	8	21.6
Co-tenant	4	10.8
Others*	5	13.5
<i>Location of rape</i>		
Perpetrators home	20	54.1
Victims home	8	21.6
Roadside	5	13.5
Others*	4	10.8
<i>Nature of rape</i>		
Gang rape	13	35.1
Single person rape	24	64.9
<i>Sought health care</i>		
Yes	29	78.4
No	8	21.6
<i>Prior history of rape</i>		
Yes	4	10.8
No	23	62.1
NA	10	27.1
<i>Outcome of report to police</i>		
Case withdrawn	21	56.8
Perpetrator jailed/in custody	6	16.2
Case under investigation	5	13.5
Perpetrator absconded	5	13.5

\*Class mates, relatives

\*\*School, uncompleted building

Concerning the profile of the perpetrators, forty-three men, whose ages ranged from 14-85 years, perpetrated the rape. The rapists were mainly young persons (70%) belonging to 14-23 years age group (Table 3). The majority of these men are students, commercial taxi/bus drivers or apprentices. Forty-two percent of the men were single, 40% were married.

### Discussion

There are two limitations to this type of study. First, rape reported to the police may be a tip of the iceberg of sexual coercion [15] because the stigma associated with this behaviour in Nigeria discourages victims from reporting to the police or seeking judicial redress. Another disincentive for reporting rape to law enforcement agencies is the judgemental attitude of police and prosecutors which exacerbate rather than ameliorate the experience of victims [16]. As a result many victims may prefer to suffer in silence than report incidence of rape to the police. Secondly, the high proportion of missing data indicates the limited capacity of the police in Nigeria to keep accurate sexual-related crime data. Therefore, the results of this study must be interpreted with caution.

**Table 3:** Profile of perpetrators of rape in Ibadan, Nigeria (n=17)

Item	No.	%
<i>Age</i>		
11-18	11	25.6
19-23	19	44.2
24-28	6	14
29-33	1	2.3
34 and above	4	9.3
NA	2	4.7
<i>Occupation</i>		
Commercial bus driver	6	14
Factory worker	4	9.3
Bus conductor	3	6.9
Trader	5	11.6
Student	10	23.2
Apprentice	3	6.9
Others*	12	27.9
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	18	41.9
Married	17	39.5
NA	8	18.6
<i>Level of education</i>		
None	3	6.9
Primary	1	2.3
Secondary	21	48.8
Tertiary	3	6.5
NA	15	34.9
<i>Religion</i>		
Islam	22	51.2
Christianity	20	46.5
NA	1	2.3

Despite these limitations, the study has provided some useful information on rape in this area. The number of cases in this study is higher than the 19 incidents of rape reported by Obot [14] who reviewed in 1989 police records for six years. The difference may be an indication of changing attitude to disclosure of this type of behaviour. All the victims were raped mainly by people that they knew or were acquainted with, a finding consistent with survey data which confirms that perpetrators of rape are typically people well known to their victims, including peers, intimate partners and relatives [1-3,15]. One study from Lima Peru, found 90% of young mothers aged 12-16 years were victims of rape perpetrated by fathers, step-fathers and other male relatives [17]

The fact that the majority of the victims of rape are girls suggests that rape primarily affects only female. However, survey findings are increasingly showing that boys also experience forced sex [10,16]. For example, one study from Swaziland shows that boys were sodomised by men who offered their victims glue to keep them "high" during the act [18]. More studies are needed to explore the context in which non-consensual sex occur in boys.

The results also provide insight into the experiences of rape victims. About 35% of the victims were

raped by gangs while 22% did not receive medical care. Omorodion and Olusanya found a similar problem in Benin where 46% of the victims of sexual assault were raped by gangs [13]. This raises concern about the physical, psychological impact of forced sex on the victims. Forced sex also puts young girls at higher risk of HIV as ripping and tearing of the vaginal walls facilitates HIV infection [19].

The study highlights the challenges involved in prosecuting sexual-related offences in Nigeria. Despite legal provision for prosecution of sexual offences [7] the police stopped its investigations of a good number of the cases due to requests from parents or guardians who wanted such cases to be withdrawn. This action is unacceptable but must be understood within the social and cultural context of the setting of the study. There is a common belief in Nigeria that female victims of rape will experience great difficulty in finding a suitable spouse [8]. Thus, parents/guardians of victims requested termination of investigation and prosecution of the rapists in order to avoid the publicity which would result if the case is tried in court. In addition, victims of rape and other forms of sexual coercion in Nigeria may believe that it is their lot to endure such violent act [20]. Finally there are many difficulties involved in seeking redress for rape in the Nigerian legal system. For example, the conditions required for conviction of rape are stringent. According to the Criminal Laws of Oyo State the essential requirements for convicting a perpetrator of rape are that sexual intercourse was forced, that there is evidence of marks of violence on the body of the victim, that there is a sign of struggle at the scene of rape, that the victim made an outcry whereby she can be heard, that the immediate report of sexual coercion is extracted from the victim without force and that the victim submits herself for medical examination.<sup>7</sup> Consequently perpetrators of rape go unpunished while victims continue to suffer in silence. Yet, punishment is a necessary deterrent for rape and other forms of sexual coercion. This problem poses one of the major challenges to addressing rape-related problems in Nigeria.

We conclude by recommending a large scale review of police records to fully understand the extent of the problem in this environment. Public enlightenment programs through the media are required to reduce the stigma associated with rape and encourage greater disclosure of the problem which in turn will lead to prosecution of perpetrators.

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