

2020

Sexual Violence: An epidemic in a pandemic

The impact of Covid-19 on sexual and reproductive health and rights of Women and girls in Nigeria



Vera Uwaila Omozuwa, a 22-year-old microbiology student of the University of Benin was raped and killed when she had gone to read in the church, she was hit with fire extinguisher.

Baraka Bello, a student of the Department of Science Laboratory Technology (SLT), Federal College of Animal Health and Production, Moor Plantation, Ibadan, was raped and killed on June 1, 2020

Grace Oshiagwu a student identified has been reportedly raped and killed in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, the third in the state in two weeks.

All these girls were unarmed and defenceless

Introduction

The first corona virus case was reported on February 27 by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, part of the laboratory network of the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control. This was the first confirmed patient in sub-Saharan Africa. The Italian man was reported to have arrived from Milan and was travelling through Lagos to another state. The first corona virus death was recorded on March 23 2020, a 67 year old male who returned home following medical treatment in the United Kingdom. As at June 22, 2020 a total of 20,244 Corona Virus cases had been confirmed in Nigeria, with 12,847 active cases, 6,879 discharged cases and 518 deaths.

This is half of the story - the main story is that during this pandemic there has been an epidemic of rape affecting women of all ages. The Nigerian Police recorded 717 rape cases between January and May 2020. The Inspector-General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, shared this information with State House Correspondents after meeting with President Muhammadu Buhari at the State House in Abuja in June.

COVID-19 crisis **is having specific impact** on women and girls and the government can address this by ensuring that all interventions in all areas target women and girls especially their SRHR needs. Unfortunately they are locked down with abusers which have never been the case in the history of the country.

Women and girls need safe and dignified health care, protection from safety and security risks resulting from movement restrictions, and assistance to overcome abuses they currently face. In many instances, these challenges faced by women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis are exacerbated by entrenched legal, social and economic inequalities and unequal power relations between men and women. The following are few cases that VSI recorded:

Vera Uwaila Omozuwa, a 22-year-old microbiology student, sought the quiet of her empty church in Benin City, southern Nigeria, as a place to study. Hours later she was raped and killed in a crime that has sparked outrage across Nigeria. A church security guard found Uwa, as she is known, unconscious in a pool of blood. According to her family, she was rushed to hospital but died the next day.

In Ogun State, an Abeokuta Magistrates' Court sentenced a 21-year-old man, Musa Anifowose, to two years in the correctional centre for raping an eight-year-old girl on the 11th of June, 2020. Anifowose, who resides at No. 2, Isale Iyemule, Ijebu Ode, was sentenced to one-count charge of sexual abuse.

A 25-year-old man, Wasiu Bankole, was arrested by men of the Ogun State police command for forcefully having carnal knowledge of a 70-year-old woman (name withheld). The suspect was arrested following a report by the victim at Agbado division of the command. This act took place on June 2, 2020

A 25-year-old man, Ezekiel Yunana, was in police custody for raping an 85-year-old grandmother in Rafi local government area of Niger State. The victim reported that she was sleeping when the suspect broke into her room through the window and forcefully had carnal knowledge of her.

A Chief Magistrates Court in Osun State on May 21st remanded a 26-year-old man, Fatai Oyeniyi, in Ilesa Correctional Centre for allegedly raping a 10-year-old minor.

The Osun police command arrested a 29-year-old-man, Adeleye Olusesan, for alleged rape of the three-year-old daughter of his lover. The police said he committed the act on February 18 in Ifetedo area of the state.

A man (name withheld), who lives in Mechanic Village area of Kanshio, Makurdi, forcefully took a 14-year-old girl to an uncompleted building and allegedly raped her. The suspect has also confessed to the crime and will be charged to court soon.

A landlord trespassed into his tenant's house and forcefully raped a 15-year-old girl who was asleep.

Baraka Bello, a student of the Department of Science Laboratory Technology (SLT), Federal College of Animal Health and Production, Moor Plantation, Ibadan, was raped and killed on June 1.

Suspected ritualists killed a 29-year-old woman, Azeezat Somuyiwa, who was seven months pregnant in her home on June 5.

A student identified as Grace Oshigwu has been reportedly raped and killed in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, the third in the state in two weeks.

Mr Adamu said 799 suspects have so far been arrested while 631 cases have been conclusively investigated and charged to court. He said 52 cases are still being investigated. The police chief called on Nigerians to join in efforts to tackle rape and other sexual violence by ensuring prompt report of cases and working with the police to apprehend the suspects.

Following this ugly trend the Governors across Nigeria met and agreed to declare a state of emergency over rape and other forms of gender based violence. There is a commitment by 36 governors of all 36 states to impose tougher measures against sex offenders. The government also plans to inaugurate an inter-ministerial committee aimed at proposing legislatives charges to ensure

that sexual violence is dealt with in line with international practices. Ekiti state and Lagos are in the lead as they have already launched sexual offenders register in their states. The register will contain the names of all those prosecuted for sexual violence. The Akwa Ibom state government in June 2020 passed the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act.

CNN

Following

Nigerian women are taking to the streets in protests against rape and sexual violence

By Bukola Adebayo, CNN

June 9, 2020 at 2:03 PM · 2 min read



Tobi Ayodele of Vision Spring Initiatives holds up a placard during the mass protest in Lagos Nigeria

Apart from the figures released by the Police IG, there is limited actionable information about impact of Covid-19 on Women and Girls sexual and reproductive health and rights in the country. This is partly due to exclusion from government intervention during the pandemic and paucity of data to support community-based response and broader advocacy. Many CSOs and Coalitions are undertaking their own assessments within their communities. However these commendable efforts are sometimes limited in reach, are not always coordinated with government and other relevant agencies and might have limited value or acceptance.

Recommendations:

Short term recommendation (Immediate Action)

- Identify solutions, mitigate risks, and work together on implementation. It is critical for organisations and communities to maintain agency in the response and recovery process in the fight against gender based violence during the pandemic; capacities of diverse civil society organisations must be integrated as strengths in government effort.
- COVID-19 response should be holistic and intersectional. Young people should be part of all interventions that are likely to impact them.
- All state governments should as a matter of urgency ensure the passage and domestication of the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act.
- Government should establish special courts to fast track cases of rape and other forms of violence against women and girls.
- Support community-based response to meet immediate community needs through support for assessments and response planning.
- Support civil society coordination role and learning between government and other government agencies such as NAPTIP, police, human rights commission and others responding to cases of violence against women and girls.
- Where possible, avoid delaying programs that provide essential funding for support for enquiry into rape and other forms of violence and mental health issues, psychosocial support services.
- Ensure that the design of COVID-19 specific emergency response programs addresses the rights, needs and strengths of women, girls and persons with disabilities in areas including (but not only) food, GBV,

- Advocate for rights-based responses that leave no-one behind and that do no harm, and use avenues to challenge human rights violations perpetrated as part of, or, under the guise of, COVID-19 responses.

Medium-term recommendations

- Support civil society organisations to develop or contribute to recovery plans that address longer term sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of women and girls.
- Support partnership with government agencies and civil society organisations, development actors to develop enduring relationships to ensure that support to communities does not end after the pandemic.
- Provide organisational support for CSOs, considering their contribution as essential services to facilitate and legitimize their support.

Long-term recommendations:

- Monitor the implementation and impact of interventions and strategies, and provide ongoing support to CSOs and communities working to end all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Evaluate these impacts by developing comprehensive report that summarises the experience and Provide guidance for policy-makers, CSOs and survivors of gender based violence.
- Support diverse organisations, faith based institutions and networks that can undertake COVID-19 community-based interventions and reaching all communities.
- Work with diverse CSOs and communities; men and boys to understand and address protection challenges.
- Support diverse CSOs to communicate needs and advocate with governments and development actors; and use this opportunity to encourage relationships to support longer-term interventions that address the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of women and girls.

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