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# Characterizing Rapists and Their Victims in Select Nigeria Newspapers

*Oludayo Tade and Collins Udechukwu*

## Abstract

While offender and victim characterization offers clues to devising preventive strategies and victim therapy, existing studies in Nigeria are yet to capture this empirically. Using two national dailies, about 331 rape cases have been analyzed. The rapists were found to be of the age group 18–55 years. The victims' age has been reported to be between 1 and 20 years. Rape victims were mostly females (>90%) compared to males. Most of the rapists are labeled as familiar foes meaning, father, relatives, or neighbors. Third-party guardianship is mentioned as predatory.

**Keywords:** rape, Nigeria, victim, crime, offender

## 1. Introduction

Sexual violence, rape in particular against girls and women, is a sad reality in Nigeria in particular and some parts of Africa. Like other crimes that go unreported, rape is mostly unreported to formal agencies of social control in Nigeria partly due to trust gap, associated stigma against the victims, fear of re-victimization, cultural barriers, religious sentiments, and the powerlessness of the victims in pursuing justice. Nonetheless, the media continues to play key roles in tracking rape cases in Nigeria by foregrounding rape episodes in their reportage. Through their coverage of rape stories, the “private problem” as experienced by a victim is made “public trouble” by eliciting societal reactions from state and non-state actors. In other words, rape is not only reported as crime or social problem, but also as an item that questions current state of morality and calling for moral awakening and vigilance [1]. In understanding deviance and crime, characterization of the act (Rape), actors (who they are), social situation (context of the crime) and the definers (reactions of the law and the public) of such actions become important not only in appreciating the magnitude of the problem but in devising prevention strategies and victim therapy. In this paper, we analyze a corpus of newspaper coverage of rape in Nigeria. We sought answers to: how do print media characterize rape offenders and victims?

In Nigeria, the criminal and the penal codes view rape as a serious offense based on how they defined the crime. Thus rape is defined under Section 357 of the Nigerian criminal code which is applicable to the southern part of Nigeria as:

*Any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation*

*of any kind or by fear of harm, or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in The case of a married woman, by personating her husband is guilty of An offense which is called rape.*

In the Northern part of Nigeria, rape is defined under Section 282 of the penal code as:

1. "A man is said to commit rape who...has sexual intercourse With a woman in any of the following circumstances: (a) against Her will; (b) obtained by putting her in fear of death or of hurt; (c) With her consent when the man knows that he is not her husband And that her consent is given because she believes that he is the Man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married; (d) With or without her consent when she is under fourteen years Of age or of unsound mind."
2. "Sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not considered as rape, if she has attained to puberty."

The two definitions show that in Nigeria, the conception of rape is seen as being perpetuated only by men against women and not vice versa. In other places, this is not the case because it has also been recognized that a man can also be victim to rape and it may be perpetuated by any person including a woman or a man. The definitions also never factored in non-penetrative rape such as oral sex and use of objects or other instrument aside from the organs as rape. This puts into context what could be adjudicated upon in Nigeria owing to existing laws. Not minding Nigeria law, literature recognizes date rape, anger rape, prison rape, war rape, spousal rape, gang rape, sadistic rape, statutory rape, elderly rape, rape of children and rape by deception [2].

In Nigeria, Lagos state Police Command recorded 678 rape cases between March 2012 and March 2013 alone. Despite these statistics, few are convicted while many withdraw their cases [3]. Making up for the unrecorded and unreported are the media through their coverage of rape cases. A few examples of such will suffice here: a 55-year-old man was reported to have abducted and raped a 14-year-old girl for 4 days [4]. Also a pastor was reported to have raped his neighbors' daughter aged 12 after luring her with biscuits and money [5]. Equally, a 15 year old girl was also raped by a tricycle rider after which he gave her N200 [6]. Similarly, a teacher was arrested after he defiled his 3 year old student [7]. Also at least 100 cases of rape were also reported in court in Kano in 2013, in which only about 40 offenders were convicted. Similarly, in Anambra state, about 155 incidences and complaints on rape were recorded by some NGOs that worked on sexual violence in the state. However, only 12 out of the 155 cases were taken up by the police and surprisingly none of them was successfully prosecuted.

While rape statistics are crucial to showcase the enormity of rape, it nonetheless, does not capture the social reality of rape in those countries. This is because victims of rape or sexual violence as it is called elsewhere often do not report and therefore do not get captured in criminal statistics. A number of studies attest to the fact that police statistics never capture the magnitude of rape reality [8, 9]. Furthermore, statistics are figures which do not capture narratives of perpetrators and victims. Existing data do not show such vital demographics which can be used in characterizing victims and their offenders. In other words, figures hide actualities and the "flesh" of the phenomenon needed for qualitative analysis. It is in this light that we add to existing body of researches on rape by filling this gap.

Oduah [10] gave the following as factors that may lead to or be the cause of increase in rape cases in the Nigerian society, they are; gaps that are embedded in the laws of the country and the strict adherence by the law court for the provision of burden of proof by the victim and the prosecutors; delays in the judicial system; corruption of the judiciary; stigmatization; family ties (in situations where rape/child rape was committed by people who are close relatives of the victims as a result the family settles the case among themselves and therefore not report these crimes to the police for prosecution); fear of attacks and intimidation (in the sense that the victims most times are afraid that if they report, the perpetrator or rapist may re-attack them and in some cases these rapists are deadly and cruel) immoral dressing on the part of the girls and inadequate parental care. It is however important to note that in a situation where the victim fails to provide the above proof of rape, the accused then has the privilege to walk free even if the act was indeed committed. As noted by Musbau [11] rape offenders are having a jolly ride because the burden of proof lies with the victim. The victim alone bears the burden of providing the bed sheets used to rape, providing her underwear and not washing herself before going to the police station or the hospital. Further challenge being faced by victims of rape includes delays in getting and providing the medical reports of the test. This is due to the poor state of health facilities and inadequate finance to quicken the processing of such medical reports.

Acts of rape is widespread elsewhere in Africa. For instance, rape is ubiquitous in South Africa (SA). In terms of statistics, SA recorded a total of 39,828 cases of rape (under the sexual offenses categorization of crime) between 2016 and 2017 [12]. In another African country, Zimbabwe, at least one woman is raped every 90 min while 500 women are sexually abused monthly. This means that at least 16 women get raped daily. Elsewhere in East Africa, Kenya recorded a total of 2648 rape cases as at 2015 [13].

Media construction of rape has produced different consequences in other climes. Nagar [14] stressed the factors underlying social construction of rape in India. He notes that the importation of “loan” words by the media in constructing rape marginalizes other sufferers other than the middle class or upwardly mobile women. Using loan words, media outlets depict class categories of victims by underscoring gender norms as well as the barriers facing raped women in India. In other words, rape construction is affected by the social-cultural contexts and ideological prisms of reporters. Furthermore, Nagar [14] questions the deification of rape victims in India which suppresses their victimhood and suffering. It follows that victims of rape or sexual violence in India are mythically characterized. We argue therefore that the portrayals of rape stories by the media more often than not, reflect power relationship in headline casting and story narration.

Scholars note that media depiction of rape victims devotes much attention to the victims and overlooks the rapist thereby presenting the victim as lacking agency and powerless. In reporting violence against women, the media are also accused of justifying the myths of sexual violence. This becomes clearer when one activates Butler's [15] notion of gender performativity and the consequences of failing to execute assigned gender roles of being submissive. Thus, it is believed that women cause rape by failing to submit their bodies. Further to this, Bonnes [3] notes that the way a South African newspaper (Grocott's Mail) reports rape perpetuates gender and racial stereotyping. While not all rape catches media attention, those in the media sustains rape myths. In the United States, Sacks et.al [16] found that local media reporting “on sexual assault might directly reinforce some of the commonly known rape myths.” Meanwhile, rape myths can also discourage reportage. The perpetuation of rape myths in the media coverage of rape can engender negative



attitude towards the victims or complete violence against women. This may further the suffering of victims of rape by refusing to report when violated.

Writing on the consequences of rape for return migration, Patil and Purkayastha [17] found that due to the permissive rape culture of girls and women in India, Indians in Diaspora, particularly those with girl-child are discouraged to return to their homeland. Indians in Diaspora view the rape culture as an expression of Indian patriarchy. This may be true depending on the perspective of the reporters of the story and whether she/he is from within the social cultural context or from without. Expatriating on this point, Bradley et al. [18] aver that writers within cultural context of rape are more likely to understand rape than the use of colonial lens in reporting rape by the western media. In deploying such colonial lens, western media are accused of privileging urban and middle class victims while marginalizing rural, poor and male victims in their reportage. They argue that the colonial view of rape constructed from western media narrowly captured the victims and perpetrators of rape in India.

To sum this review, we argue that the treatment of rape victims depend to a larger extent on the ideological leanings of different societies, the shaming culture, the spirit and form of the criminal law and the law enforcement agencies and how the media signposts a rape story.

On the nature, patterns and dynamics of rape and sexual assault, a research that was carried out by the National Crime Victim Survey (NCVS) on the Rape in America Study and The Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Rape Victimization discovered that: non-stranger or acquaintance rape was more common than stranger rape. Statistics from their findings showed that 78% of rapes/sexual assaults were perpetrated by someone known to the victims. Further investigation of perpetrator/victim relationship from their study showed that 9% of victims were raped by husbands or ex-husbands, 11% by fathers or step fathers, 10% by boyfriends or ex-boyfriends, 16% by other relatives and 29% by other non-relatives such as friends and neighbors [19]. Their findings also showed that few rapes/sexual assaults involve the use of weapon. Only about 4% of rapes/sexual assault involved the presence of fire arm and only 2% involved the use of knife. The finding suggested that rapists are more likely to gain control of their victims through deception, manipulation and betrayal of their victim's trust [19]. The report also further revealed that it was even rare for rape victims to sustain any visible physical injuries in addition to the rape and the report also stated that majority of rape go unreported as only 16% of rape was reported to the police [19]. In recent times, these figures are increasing at a geometrical rate. On perpetrators of rape, it was discovered that males constituted 99% of the offenders [19].

## **2. Methods**

Method adopted was exploratory and sampling was done with the help of Nigeria Tribune Media Library in Ibadan. Punch and Sun newspapers published from January 2012 to December 2016 were analyzed. The sample size calculation was done using 1850 editions of newspapers from both the Punch and Sun [20–23]. Using articles, headlines and rape stories, rape victims and offenders; patterns of rape among others were studied and reported. Six different months each were picked for both the Punch and Sun newspapers to represent a year and subsequently for the 5 years studied. The sample size for this population was determined by multiplying the number of days/editions of newspapers by five to cover for the 5 years studied; therefore 1850 editions of newspapers from both the Punch and Sun were purposively sampled out of which 331 rape cases were

reported and analyzed for the study. Using articles, headlines and rape stories, we analyzed characterization of rape victims and offenders; patterns of rape among others. The content analysis was employed in data presentation around the related research objectives.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Characterizing rape victims and offenders

This involved understanding the sex of the victim and offender, the age of both the victim and offender, the manner in which the rape was perpetuated, relationship between the victim and the offender, status of the victim and examining the concluded cases (**Table 1**).

Males constituted about 4% of the total number victims of rape reported for the past 5 years. On the other hand, the total number of female victims reported for the past 5 years by the two selected newspapers was three hundred and nineteen (319). In other words, females constituted about 96% of the total victims of reported rape cases within the period covered. Gill [24] has conceived rape as a criminal act that is targeted at women in order to humiliate, debase, overwhelm and control them. But Javaid [25] also found that in England and Wales, male rape are usually under-reported and are affected by the masculine nature of the police subculture.

From **Table 2**, the total number of males was three hundred and twenty nine (329). That is males constituted about 99% of those who engaged in the act of rape for the past 5 years. On the other hand, the total numbers of females who engaged in the act of rape are two (2). This means that females constituted only about 0.6% of perpetrators of the act of rape. These findings indicate that males were more likely to engage in rape than their female counterparts. This is in line with the finding in the United States that female victims accounted for a total of 94% of all completed rapes, 91% of all attempted rapes and 89% of all attempted and completed rapes [26] (**Table 3**).

Victims within the age of 1–10 recorded a total of one hundred and nine (109), which is about 33% of the total victims of reported rape cases for the past 5 years. This figure is frightening when the ages of these victims are considered especially knowing that they are children. This thus means that children between ages 1 and 10 are at a high risk of falling victims to rape. Rape of this nature are scary because these children are innocent, tender, vulnerable and they are most times raped by people they trust and look up to such as teachers, uncles, fathers, step-fathers, grandfathers, neighbors, in-laws, family friends, etc. The psychological trauma they go through after this incident is more than that of adults. These victims are also at risk of contracting several sexually transmitted diseases such as STD, HIV/AIDS and other complications such as lacerations which put their lives at risk. Daily Sun [27], reported an incident where two brothers who were teenagers raped their step-sister who was 6 years old to death.

*The suspects a 19 year old Felix and his 16 year old brother Stanley were said to have had carnal knowledge of the minor by forcefully penetrating her which led to severe injuries in the victim's private part. Aside from the injuries sustained after the alleged sexual abuse, little Miss Precious later developed protruding stomach, leading to medical complications that eventually cut short the life of the victim. Also according to report, the younger brother lured his elder brother into the act. He assured his brother that there was nothing to be afraid of and that he (Stanley) had been doing it with other children in the area.*

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	12	3.6
Female	319	96.4
Total	331	100.0

**Table 1.**  
*Sex of the victim.*

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	329	99.4
Female	2	0.6
Total	331	100.0

**Table 2.**  
*Sex of the offender.*

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a year	1	0.3
1–10	109	32.7
11–20	153	46.1
21–30	28	8.4
31–40	12	3.6
41–50	3	0.9
51–60	1	0.3
61–70	3	0.9
71 and above	2	0.6
Unknown*	19	5.7
Total	331	100.0

\*By “unknown” we mean those categories of rape victims reported with unspecified age. We included them to account for their victimhood in the study. However, non-inclusion of age does not make them less a victim.

**Table 3.**  
*Age of the victims.*

The breakdown of trust among family members who are supposed to provide protective custodies to their eventual victims call to question the weakness or lack of moral teaching/socialization in the perpetrators. This is because teenagers and adolescents continue to be arrested for contributing to the victimization of their “sisters.” All that they use is exploiting the vulnerability of the victim and in cases where the victim raises alarm, they silence them with death. This implies they understood the implication of being caught in the act or engaging in such a taboo in Nigeria. It is incest for relatives in most cultures in Nigeria to have sexual relationships. When such happens the rapist may become terribly violent and kill the victim. In a case a boy murdered his 10 year old cousin who raised the alarm for defiling her. The suspect narrated that:

*Tawa met me at the passage of my house when she came to visit me on that fateful day. I asked her where she was going and she responded that somebody sent her*

*somewhere but decided to check on me. Tawa latter dragged me into my room where she removed my trousers and both of us had sex on my bed. Then, she put my manhood into her private part and started shouting. Following this, I started asking her the reason for the alarm she was raising. The alarm raised by Tawa was after two minutes of sexual intercourse between us. When she started shouting, I got hold of her neck and nose and pressed them until she finally died [27].*

Furthermore, victims between ages 11 and 20 recorded the highest figure with a total of one hundred and fifty three (153), which is about 46% of the total victims of reported rape for the past 5 years by the selected two newspapers. The majority of victims at this range are teenagers, a period that is marked with growth and development of sexual features. This indicates that teenagers are more prone to being victims of rape than any other age category in Nigeria. The perpetrators here are also people in key positions of trust such as fathers, step-fathers; uncles, friends, family friends, cousins, grandfathers, and the clergy. For instance, a 12-year old was impregnated by a cleric in Lagos State whom she had thought was assisting her by providing her a shelter but who later exploited her weakness/vulnerability to get what he wanted. He lured and threatened to ensure the secret was not opened up. He ensured her compliance by providing her with what she needed but soon as she became pregnant, stopped caring for her. The victim stated that:

*He (Alfa) lives inside our compound. One day, he just said that I should come to his shop and I went there. He told me that I did not have a shelter; I should be sleeping inside his shop pending when I would be able to secure a place. Whenever I was sleeping in the night on the pavement, he would come around 2 am and wake me up to follow him to his shop and have sex with him. Many people in this place are aware of it. The first time he forced his private part into me, he said I should not scream. He told me I should not tell anybody but people have been seeing us. When people tried to advise me, he said I should not listen to them. He started having sex with me since I was 10 years old. He told me if I start having sex with him, he would give me money and he lured me into the corner and started touching my breasts. I wasn't happy about it and I told him to use condom, but he refused and he warned me not to tell anybody. He warned that if I tell anybody, he would use juju (charm) on me because they said that he is from Ijebu. He was giving me money but he stopped since I got pregnant.*

Going further, victims between ages 21 and 30 constituted a total of twenty eight (28) that is about 8% of the total victims of reported rape cases. Also victims between ages 31 and 40 recorded a total of twelve (12), which is about 4% of the total victims of reported rape cases in the past 5 years. In their own category, victims within the age of 41–50 recorded a total of three (3), which is about 0.9% of the total victims of reported rape cases. Also, victims between the ages of 51–60 recorded one (1) case, representing 0.3% while those aged 61–70 and 71 and above recorded only a total of five (5) rape cases representing 2% of the entire victims. From the foregoing, the findings revealed that the younger females are more susceptible to rape than the older females. They are at their prime and more attractive to rapist than older women. They constitute a cohort that can be easily manipulated, lured, coerced and yield to threat. This is because they are more vulnerable and lack of capable guardianship. While the ages of victims are younger, what age differentials exist between the victims of rape and their rapists?

Offender demographics such as age are vital in providing information about which age grade are more likely than others to rape and where social control mechanisms can be channeled. **Table 4** shows that put together the youths and middle



Age	Frequency	Percentage
13–17 (teenagers)	6	1.8
18–35 (youths)	151	45.3
36–55 (middle age)	100	30.2
55 and above (old age)	40	12
Unknown*	34	10.2
Total	331	100.0

\*Those in this category were not disclosed in the papers reviewed in our study. In other words, the age category was unspecified in the report which shows lapses in demographic reportage of age of rapists by Nigerian newspapers.

**Table 4.**  
Age of the offender.

aged (18–55) perpetrated highest percentage of rape within the period under coverage. With a percentage of 75.5% of the entire rape cases reported, these age categories constitute the deadliest in terms of rape. Reasons for its high prevalence among youths according to reports are unemployment, drug use, alcohol, coercive and sexual fantasies (resulting from pornography), peer pressure, hostility towards women (especially when the male advances are rejected), inadequate institutional support from the police and judicial system, vengeance, relationship conflict, indiscipline, wickedness and idle mind.

Refusal to date may make an offender rape a lady. This was the case when a 35 year old lured his victim out of the location where she could find help to where he is more comfortable. At the destination, he used weapon to threaten his victim and later became successful. After his arrest, he narrated:

*“Actually I have interest in her and I have been eyeing her for a long time but she refused to accept my proposal. It was since two years ago immediately we moved into that house and I saw her. I then told her that she should accompany me to Ikere-Ekiti that I want to pack some of my belongings there. So, we entered the same vehicle and when we got to Ikere, I told her that I wanted to reach my site, an uncompleted building. There was nothing much that happened there. I only held her hand and said she should let us have fun together. So when I was dragging it with her, mistakenly the bottle in my hand jumped up and wounded her in her head. She then fell down; I then had sex with her. And when we got home, she reported the matter to her sister” [27].*

Furthermore it is important to account for the increasing occurrence of rape among those aged 36–55. We found that midlife crisis which may make middle age men seek intimate relationship with a younger woman, boredom, work related challenges/stress (unemployment or sack), woman crisis (inability to attract the right woman) accounted for the reported rape cases among this cohort. For example inability to attract a woman owing to problem of finance made a 55 year old man impregnate a 13 year old girl. Again, the strategy is to explore the weakness of the victim in raping them. The rapist explains that:

*They (the girls) sell petty consumable things and each time they come to my house, I will lure them into the house with the excuse that I want them to watch TV. Since most of them do not have one in their houses, they would be glad to come in. I would play one of my videos where people are having sex (pornographic films) and in the process convince them to have sex with me. I am so ashamed of myself*

*because I have deflowered a lot of them through that process and they keep coming back for more.*

Talking further on why he chose under-age girls, the rapist stated that;

*the much I have given those girls is N200 at a time. I felt that it is expensive spending much money on Adults. I know that it is a crime and I ask God to forgive me and give me a second chance. I was greedy that is why my wife abandoned me to my fate.*

The offenders who are classified as old age ranged from 56 and above and they recorded a total of forty (40) which is about 12% of the total reported rape cases. They are mostly grandfathers, fathers, step-fathers, guardians, and community leaders. They are people that the victims trust and hold in high esteem as emblem of wisdom. We found that they rape owing to boredom, indiscipline, idle mind, wickedness and the need to have intimate relationship with younger girls. A 7-year old rape victim narrated how she was rape by a 65-year old man.

*On Friday, my mummy was not around and he came to fetch water (like he normally does). When he was passing in front of our house, he asked me to follow him to come and collect biscuit. When I got to Baba's house, he put off my shoes and carried me to his bed. He removed my pants and lay on my chest. When I was shouting, he said I should not shout that he would give me biscuit and N20. When he finished, I saw blood coming out and Baba used a cloth to clean it. He said I should not tell anybody. He gave me biscuit and N20. He called me again the next day and did it again [4, 6].*

This shows that the rape actualized using luring but more importantly, we argue that the occurrence of rape is the convergence of a suitable target, willing offender in the absence of capable guardianship.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study has examined the coverage of rape episodes in Nigeria. Specifically, we purposively selected two national newspapers with dedicated crime reporting pages for our study. Our goal was to sift from rape coverage by the selected print media, characterization of victims and rapists. In doing this we analyzed data around the age of the victims, sex of the victims and the age of the offender and supported this by victims' and rapists' narratives.

Findings indicated that females were reported more as victims of rape than males out of the 331 rape reports covered in the dailies. Although males were also victims of rape, the percentage was about 4%. This however should not be taken to mean that males are not victims of rape. What is most important is the socio-cultural environment within which rape occurs, ideological leanings of the reporters and the behavior of the criminal law in Nigeria with respect to male. We noted earlier that the law blinds it eyes against the tendency that a male can be raped in Nigeria which calls to question how male victims of rape will seek justice where their victimhood is not recognized. Furthermore, males were more prone to being perpetrators of rape than their female counterparts; however, females can also become perpetrators too. Concerning the age of victims, we found that the young adults and the middle aged were more susceptible to rape than any other age category. Conversely, the same cohorts of victims also featured prominently as highest perpetrators of rape within the 5-year period.

Characterizing victims and offenders of rape enables us the privilege of knowing that the perpetrators of rape were mainly “familiar-foes.” Few were strangers. Family members, relatives and neighbors dominated rapists who exploited the knowledge of victims’ vulnerability as well as familiarity to execute rape. Apparent from this study is an implied collapse of moral community and the limits of trust in social relationships between the neighbors, parents, families, associates and friends.

Arising from the findings, rape as recorded occurred owing to mastery of the routine activities of victims, their vulnerability and the absence of capable guardianship. According to the routine activity theories, crime occurrence is the convergence of three factors: the attractive target; a willing offender; and lack of capable guardianship. The routine activities of parents which makes the girl-child find “unholy solace” in predatory “guardians” must be broken. Informal social control, which starts from the family, must incorporate security training. Victims of rape covered are mostly from the lower social economic rung of the society and this speaks to issues of power relations between the victims and the offenders not only in terms of age differentials but the limit of resistance in the most vulnerable condition. Third-party guardianship may be predatory and parents of children in the susceptible category as discovered in this study must create and secure safe environment to reduce victimization of the girl-child. At level of governance, post-rape therapy is needed for victims to aid recovery of their self-worth.

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### **Author details**

Oludayo Tade\* and Collins Udechukwu  
Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

\*Address all correspondence to: dotad2003@yahoo.com

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