

Psychosocial Variables Influencing Disclosure and Help Seeking Behaviour of Rape Victims in Cross River State, Nigeria

Womi Eteng Samuel^a, Okorie Kalu Osonwa^b & Frank Attah^c

^aGraduate Student, University of Calabar, P.M.B. 1115, Calabar, daisywome@gmail.com
^{b&c}Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, P.M.B. 1115, Calabar

Abstract

Background and Objective: Although rape is an age-long crime, its recent hike in Nigeria is not only frightening, but has also left many troubled particularly as the rapists do not only have violent, and coercive sexual intercourse with their victims, but in certain cases also end the victim's life in cold blood. More perplexing is the culture of silence and the indifference of victims to seek help. This study examines specific factors that discourages rape victims from speaking out and seeking help in Cross River State, Nigeria. **Methods:** Cross-sectional survey research design that allows the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods was opted for. Questionnaires are distributed to 1,200 respondents selected through multi-stage sampling techniques, while in-depth interviews are administered on 16 respondents across the three senatorial districts of Cross River State. Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis and interpretation of research findings and the qualitative data are analysed using content analysis. **Results:** There is an upsurge in the incident of rape cases and an increasing number of rape victims do not report such incidents or seek help due to fear of stigmatisation, the victim's relationship to the perpetrator and attitude of law enforcement agents. **Conclusion:** Despite overwhelming evidence of rape at the public domain, it remains a silent epidemic and a serious public health issue that is mostly underreported and unrecognized with many victims concealing their experiences of the abuse. There must be an aggressive campaign against rape and the provision of incentives by government that would encourage and support victims to speak out and seek help at the right time and place.

Keywords: Behaviour, Culture, Help seeking, Psychosocial, Rape, Silence, Victim

DOI: [URL:https://doi.org/10.36758/ijpamr/v6n5.2021/05](https://doi.org/10.36758/ijpamr/v6n5.2021/05)

1. Introduction

Rape is a global social, health and human rights problem that has been largely undisclosed by most survivors, underreported by journalists and understudied by scholars. It is a traumatic experience with devastating health consequences, affecting both women and men globally, irrespective of class, culture, race, educational status, income, and ethnic affiliation (Ezugwu, Ohayi, Iyoke, & Nnaji, 2017; Falade, & Fasuan, 2017). Nigeria, like other countries of the world is bedevilled with the increasing reports of rape incidents especially against women and the girl child. This crime in most part of Nigeria has assumed an unimaginable proportion and dimension. Although rape is an age-long crime, its recent hike in Nigeria is not only frightening, but has also left many perplexed particularly as the rapists do not only have violent, and coercive sexual intercourse with their victims, but in certain cases also end the victim's life in cold blood. Rape is often associated with psychological, physical, and social trauma; indeed, it occasionally results in fatality either from shock, severe injury or murder by the perpetrator in an attempt to conceal their identity (Ezechi, Musa, David, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, Idigbe, Ezeobi, Ohihoin, & Ujah, 2016).

Rape can take many forms, such as date rape, power rape, gang rape, anger or retaliatory rape, and sadistic rape, and can occur under very different circumstances. Rape victims are often assaulted by one individual or several people (e.g. gang-rapes); the incident may be planned or a surprise attack. Although rape occurs most commonly in the victim's home, the perpetrator's home, or the dark corner of the street, it also takes place in many other settings, such as the workplace, at school, in prisons, cars, the streets or open spaces (e.g. parks, farmland). The perpetrator of a sexual assault may be a date, an acquaintance, a friend, a family member, an intimate partner or former intimate partner, or a stranger, but more often than not, it is someone known to the victim. There is no stereotypical perpetrator; sexually violent men come from all backgrounds, rich and poor, academic and uneducated, religious and non-religious. Perpetrators may be persons in positions of authority who are respected and trusted (e.g. a doctor, teacher, tourist guide, priest, police officer) and thus less likely to be suspected of being a rapist. Simultaneously, it is generally acknowledged that rape is pervasive in all countries and at all levels of society; available statistics concerning the prevalence of rape around the world in general and in Nigeria, in particular, are minimal.

Findings from a National survey carried out in 2014 revealed that one in four females reported experiencing sexual violence, with 10 per cent reporting one incidence of rape (Folayam, Odetoymbo, Harrison & Brown, 2014). Rape has severe, acute, and chronic psychological, sexual, and reproductive impact on survivors' well-being. In the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault, the survivor may report various psychological responses, including acute stress reactions, emotional detachment, and sleep disturbances. Other adverse emotional and psychological consequences include self-blame, difficulties in social and work adjustment and sexual functioning, fear, anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Suprakash, Ajay, Murthy & Biswajit, 2017). Most significantly, perhaps, rape can have devastating long-term psychological effects, influencing and radically altering a person's entire life course. Some individuals may experience difficulties in functioning at work, home or school. Phobias, such as fear of crowds or a fear of being alone, may begin to appear depending on where the rape took place. Sexual dysfunction or changes in a person's sex life are prevalent. Some of the sexual problems women often encounter after rape are sexual aversion, flashbacks of the rape during sex, vaginismus, and orgasmic dysfunction.

Despite the legal provisions of life imprisonment with or without canning for sexual assaulters in Nigeria, the high prevalence of rape in Nigeria, and Cross River State, in particular, may not be unconnected with the fact that most cases of rape are underreported and hardly disclosed by the survivors out of fear of stigmatisation. Other complex and multi-faceted reasons for non-reporting are rejection by society, safety concerns, an enduring culture of male dominance, and the fact that even for cases reported, the perpetrators are rarely prosecuted, female social and economic disempowerment, and victim relationship to perpetrator. Similarly, Ezugwu, Ohayi, Iyoke, and Nnaji (2017) posit that most rape victims do not disclose or report the incidents because of factors such as avoidance of stigmatisation, the family may wish to keep it secret, especially when the perpetrator is a family member. Also, despite the severe penalty of life imprisonment for rape in Nigeria, perpetrators are hardly prosecuted, which may discourage victims from reporting. According to Geidan, Njoku, and Bako (2010), Ogunwale, Oshiname, and Ajuwon, (2012), in Nigerian many rape survivors rarely seek medical care, legal redress, and psychosocial help. Ezechi, Musa, David, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, Idigbe, Ezeobi, Ohihoin, Ujah (2016) revealed that one in every five women is a victim of rape, and globally, 35% of women are rape victim with Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia reporting the highest incidence of rape. The reported figures are inaccurate and often underestimated as most cases of rape are

under-reported by the victims because of the associated stigma. In Nigeria, only 2 of 40 cases of rape are reported, attributing this amongst other reasons, to the complex legal requirements needed to prove the cases and the associated stigma (Ezechi, Musa, David, Wapmuk, Gbajabiamila, Idigbe, Ezeobi, Ohihoin, & Ujah, 2016).

Several literatures have discussed the subject of rape, the socio-psychological, socio-cultural and health implications of rape, the prevalence of rape and the characteristic of survivors of rape, and the features of the perpetrators of rape. However, there are limited studies on the socio-cultural factors influencing disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. Understanding and dealing with the psychosocial and cultural factors influencing disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims could assist rape survivors in opening up, consequently providing accurate and adequate statistics required in fashioning out strategies toward the prevention of rape. More so, the increasing incident of rape and low reporting practises among victims and survivors underscore the need for this study. Thus, this study was conducted to determine psychosocial and cultural variables influencing disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria. The following research questions were put forward to guide the study:

- (i) Stigmatisation does not significantly influence the disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State.
- (ii) Victim relationship with the perpetrator does not significantly influence the disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State.
- (iii) The attitude of law enforcement agent does not significantly influence disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design and study area

The study adopts an exploratory cross-sectional design, that allows the use of qualitative and quantitative data. This design is considered appropriate for this study because it provides a better and comprehensive understanding of the problem under study. The study is conducted in Cross River State, Nigeria using the 3 senatorial Districts namely: Southern, Central and Northern Senatorial Districts, with 18 Local Government Areas and one hundred and ninety-three (193) wards.

2.2. Participants and procedures

A representative sample size of one thousand two hundred (1,200) respondents are selected from the three senatorial districts of Cross River State, Nigeria. Using Taro Yamane 1967 sample size determinant, and level of maximum variability ($P = 0.05$), a sample of 1200 is computed—out of which—1167 respondents are finally used for analysis. The sample size is determined differently in the three senatorial districts of Cross River State, Nigeria. This is done with the aim of arriving at a representative sample size for the study. The research adopts a multi-stage sampling technique because of the large size of the study population which constitute clusters like towns, villages and households.

2.3. Data collection methods

For triangulation, the mixed methods of scientific investigation, consisting of quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection were adopted. The instruments for data collection were a structured questionnaire and Key Informant Interview (KII). The research instruments were administered by four researchers to selected respondents in the study area. The study takes into cognizance ethical principles such as voluntary participation, anonymity, specific permission required for audio or video recording, participant's right to withdraw. Ethical clearance was obtained from appropriate authorities. Three senior lecturers in the Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Nigeria, validated the research instruments. Of the 1,200 questionnaires distributed, 1,167 copies were returned and used for analysis, while, 33 copies were not properly completed, thus were rejected. The study observes all known ethical principles guiding social research such as informed consent, specific permission required for audio or video recording, voluntary participation, participant's right to withdraw and cultural sensitivity. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital ethical committee.

Qualitative data is elicited using the in-depth interview guide. The in-depth interview is conducted among 16 participants. On average, each interview session with either a rape victim, health worker or security personnel takes 45 to 60 minutes. All the sessions are tape-recorded with due consent obtained from the participants. The selection of these participants is based on two criteria which are: the participant must have been raped and the participant must have a reputation for being knowledgeable (health workers, security personnel and traditional rulers) on rape related issues in the communities, in the study area. Participation in the research is completely anonymous and participants were encouraged to provide honest responses based on knowledge and their experiences.

2.4. Data analysis

In analysing the data, a proper check was carried out on both the quantitative and qualitative components of the data collected to ensure that all items used for the analysis were properly responded to. Responses from the quantitative data were edited, coded and analysed using appropriate descriptive statistics like frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis after proper editing and transcription were done by the researchers. Catchy phrases and expressions gathered were identified and organised under distinct themes.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Respondents' socio-demographic data

Majority of respondents 54.2% are female, while, 45.8% are male. Again, the age distribution of respondents shows that 26.6% are between 41-50 years, followed by 24.7% who are between 31-40 years, next is ages 21-30 18.3%, followed by ages 51 years and above 17.1% while 13.3% of the respondents are below 20 years. The educational qualification of the respondents are as follows: 27.1% of the respondents have only First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), followed by 17.9% of the respondents who have General Certificate of Education (GCE) or Secondary School Certificate of Education (SSCE). Also, 13.7% have National Certificate of Education (NCE) or Ordinary National Diploma (OND), next is 32.3% who have First Degrees in the forms of Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelor's Degree, while, 8.9 % have M.Sc. and Ph.D degrees. The marital statistics of the respondents indicates that, 47.9% of the respondents are single, followed by 50.2% of the respondents who are married while the remaining respondents (1.9%) are divorced. In terms of respondents' occupation, 29.2% are civil servants, next is

students with 21.9%, followed by farmers who are 19.9%, next is businessmen with 19.2% while 9.7% of the respondents indicates others.

Rape status

It is common knowledge that the incident of rape is on the increase both in urban and rural settings in Nigeria, what is not yet clear is the magnitude of the problem in the study area. As regards rape status, respondents were asked if they have been raped in the past. The data reveals that only 11.8% of the respondents indicated that they have been raped in the past, responses from 35.3% shows that they have not been raped in the past, 29.3% indicated “No” but maintained that they know individuals who are victims of rape in their community, while 23.6% indicated “No” but have heard that someone has been raped in their community. The finding shows that the incident of rape is relatively high in Cross River State, though often under reported by victims and sympathizers for reasons best known to them.

Most vulnerable victims of rape

It can be observed from the data that 87.7% of the respondents indicate that young women are more vulnerable to rape attacks, 7.1 % indicate young men, 4.9 % indicate older women while 0.3 indicate older men. According to the research data, it has been observed that the problem of rape cuts across both men and women – either gender could be the victim, the age, gender or location does not make any difference. However, it is noteworthy to point out that young women constitute (87.7%) the highest percentage of rape victims while on the other hand, men are the highest perpetrators of rape and sexual violence.

Why the prevailing culture of silence and indifference in seeking help among victims?

The study reveals that many of the respondents (25.8%) report that rape victims neither disclose nor seek help because of the fear of stigmatisation while (23.7%) of respondents indicate that rape victims neither disclose the incident nor seek help because of victim’s relationship with the perpetrator. The study also reveals that some of the respondents (18.5%) agrees that rape victims neither report the incident nor seek help because of the response of law enforcement agents, (13.1%) of the respondents indicate self-blame, (11.1%) report poverty while (7.8%) of the respondent’s report ignorance as the reason why rape victims neither disclose the incidents nor seek help. It is observed in this study that, most of the rape victims in the study area do not disclose their ordeal and neither do they seek help from appropriate quarters like the hospital because of fear of stigma, victim’s relationship to the perpetrator and the attitude of law enforcement agents.

3.2. Test of hypotheses

Hypothesis one

Fear of stigmatization does not significantly influence disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State. Both variables are measured continuously and inferential statistics involving Simple linear regression statistics is used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance and the result is presented in table 1. The result of analysis as presented in table 1 reveals that the R-value of 0.288^a is significant at 0.05 alpha level (p-value of .000 is less than 0.05) hence the stated null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant contribution of fear of stigmatization to disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria. Also, the R²-value of .083 implies that 83% of total variance is accounted for by the predictor variable (fear of stigmatization). Furthermore, the regression

ANOVA reveals that, there is a moderate joint linear association (contribution) of the predictor variables (fear of stigmatization) on help seeking behaviour of rape victims in the study area given by the F-ratio (1, 1165) = 36.022 $p < 0.05$. The adjusted R^2 (.081) shows a shrinking of the unadjusted value (.083) indicating that the model could be generalized on the population. Based on the result, it is concluded that fear of stigmatization could significantly influence disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State.

TABLE 1: Summary simple linear regression analysis of contribution fear of stigmatization to disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State

Variables		Mean	Std. Deviation				
Fear of stigmatization		12.2750	4.99216				
Disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims		22.6650	6.70455				
Model	Sum of Squares	Df	F	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Sig
Regression	3118.752	1	36.022	.288 ^a	.083	.081	.000*
Residual	34458.358	1165					
Total	37577.110	1166					

Fieldwork, 2021

Hypothesis two

Victim relationship to perpetrator does not significantly influence disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria. Both variables are measured continuously, Inferential statistics involving simple linear regression statistics is used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance and the result is presented in table 2. The result of analysis as presented in table 2 reveals that the R-value of .178 is significant at 0.05 alpha level (p-value of .000 is less than 0.05) hence the stated null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant contribution of victim relationship to perpetrator to disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State. Also, the R^2 -value of 0.32 implies that 32% of total variance is accounted for by predictor variable (victim relationship to perpetrator). Furthermore, the regression ANOVA reveals that; there is a moderate joint linear association (contribution) of the predictor variable (victim relationship to perpetrator) on disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims given by the F-ratio (1, 1165) = 12.958; $p < 0.05$. The adjusted R^2 (.029) shows a shrinking of the unadjusted value (.032) indicating that the model could be generalized on the population. Based on the result, it is concluded that victim relationship to perpetrator could significantly influence disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria.

TABLE 2: Summary simple linear regression analysis of contribution of victim relationship to perpetrator to disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Victim relationship to perpetrator	14.3425	3.20247
Disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims	22.6650	6.70455

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	F	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Sig
Regression	1184.812	1	12.958	.178 ^a	.032	.029	.000*
Residual	36392.298	1165					
Total	37577.110	1166					

Fieldwork, 2021

Hypothesis three

The attitude of law enforcement agent does not significantly influence disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State. The independent variable in this hypothesis is attitude of law enforcement agent, while the dependent variable is disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims. Simple linear regression statistics was used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 Alpha level and the result is presented in table 3. The result of analysis as presented in table 3 revealed that the R-value of .254 is significant at 0.05 alpha level (p-value of .000 is less than 0.05) hence the stated null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that attitude of law enforcement agent significantly influence disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State. Also, the R²-value of 0.64 implies that only 64% of total variance is accounted for by predictor variable (attitude of law enforcement agent). Furthermore, the regression ANOVA revealed that, there was a moderate joint linear association (contribution) of the predictor variables (attitude of law enforcement agent) on disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims given by the F-ratio (1, 1165) = 27.353; p < 0.05. The adjusted R² (.062) shows some shrinkage of the unadjusted value (.064) indicating that the model could be generalized on the population. Based on the result, it was concluded that attitude of law enforcement agent influence disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria.

TABLE 3

Summary simple linear regression analysis of relationship between attitude of law enforcement agent disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude of law enforcement agent	14.3425	4.16631
Disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims	22.6650	6.70455

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	F	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Sig
Regression	2416.462	1	27.353	.254 ^a	.064	.062	.000
Residual	35160.648	1165					*
Total	37577.110	1166					

Fieldwork, 2021

3.3. Discussion of findings

Research findings on fear of stigmatization and disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims shows that, fear of stigmatization does significantly predict disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria. Other revelations made by this study is that, the disclosure of rape incidents in most cases leave the person with the feelings of shame and self-suspicion. This is supported by Saki, Kermanshahi, Mohammadi, and Mohraz, (2015) they reveal in their study that rape victims think that disclosing their status may not only create a complicated and stressful situation, but also cause the person to lose family support and health care provision. The blame on the rape victims rather than the rapist further explains clearly why rape cases are underreported and victim hardly seek help in Cross River State, Nigeria. Similarly, the study reveals that the fear of suffering more sexual abuse deepens the culture of silence among rape victims. The finding is in line with that of UNAIDS and the World Health Organization (2010) reports, who cited fear of stigma and discrimination as the main reason why people are reluctant to disclose and seek help. Self-stigma, or internalised stigma, has an equally damaging effects on the mental well-being of rape victims. This fear of discrimination breaks down the confidence of rape victims to seek help and medical care. Previous studies Taddese, Sibhatu, Kebede, and Horacio (2013); McCleary-Sillsa, Namya, Nyonid, Rweyemamud, Salvatoryd, and Stevene (2015) have shown that stigmatisation affects a person's ability to live positively, limits meaningful self-agency, quality of life, help- seeking behaviour, disclosure, adherence to treatment and access to health services. In many contexts, the isolation that comes with stigma can lead to low self-esteem, depression, and even thoughts or acts of suicide.

The finding of this study agrees with that of McCleary-Sillsa Namya, Nyonid, Rweyemamud, Salvatoryd, and Stevene (2015) whom their study isolated and identified stigma as one among the numerous socio-cultural barriers that prevents rape victim from speaking out and seeking proper help. Similarly, the findings of this study is in line with the findings of Rife (2009), who

observe that perceived stigma could prevent victims of rape from assessing certain support services and sources (clergy, parents, and other relatives).

The qualitative data collaborates significantly with the quantitative data. Responding to why rape victims find it difficult to speak out and seek help, a nurse with the General hospital Ugep submits that:

rape cases are unreported because of the fear of stigmatization. She maintained that when rape cases are made public, the victim suffers stigma in most cases till death. In order to avoid being stigmatized, victims are satisfied keeping mute about what has happen to them especially when it involves a close family member like an uncle. (IDI/Nurse/Ugep/February, 2021)

Another respondent who has come across 5-6 rape victims provides detailed explanations on how stigma can influence the disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims:

Stigmatization is actually one of the main reason rape cases are under-reported in this community. People stigmatize rape victims because they actually believe it is their fault. People feel that a raped child is spoilt and later in future that is used against her especially when she wants to get married. The perception among our people is that rape victims are not descent enough. This has led to a couple being separated when the husband discovered that his wife had been raped before they got married. (IDI/Nurse/General Hospital /February, 2021)

The opinion of a male serial rape victim who was raped when he was 12 years old by his female neighbour, who was in her early twenties during an IDI session is a confirmation that both males and females are vulnerable to rape attack. This is the excerpt of the researcher's interaction with him:

Do you think people report rape cases? No, they do not, like me when I was raped severally, I never reported to anyone, not even my parents. What made you not to report the incident to anyone even your parents? I was thinking people will think I am a bad boy, the issue of stigma and fear of what my parents will think or say. Generally, people do not report rape cases because of stigmatization, they feel if they confide in anyone. The person might end up blowing it up. So its difficulty for people to speak up when raped. (IDI/Non-teaching staff/IMT Ugep /February, 2021)

The analysis of the second hypothesis shows that, victim relationship to perpetrator does significantly predict disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria. This result indicates that, the desire of victim's family to maintain existing cordial relationship with the perpetrator influences disclosure and help seeking behaviour of the rape survivor. It is observed in the course of this study that, victims' family finds it difficult to report a perpetrator when he or she is close to the family in order to avoid ridiculing the person. The study notes that, in order to avoid shame and public embarrassment rape victims do not open up, but can seek help, when the perpetrator is a close family member. The study also reveals that parents of raped victim find it difficult to come out publicly to report such cases when the perpetrator is a member of the family. This finding is in consonance with that of Mont, Woldeyohannes, Macdonald, Kosa and Turner (2017), who agrees that women who are sexually assaulted by a current or former intimate partner are less likely than those assaulted by another known assailant or a stranger to disclose and seek help. The study concludes that women who

are sexually assaulted by current or former intimate partners utilized services offered by sexual assault and domestic violence treatment centres differently than those assaulted by other known assailants and strangers.

A psychologist working in Eja Memorial Hospital Itigidi also supported the above claims during an IDI session, by revealing how victim relationship to perpetrator influences disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims:

Rape by uncles, aunties, brothers, cousins, niece, nephew, close friends and acquaintance is far more rampant in this community than any other type of rape. In most cases, when such ugly incident occurs, family members conspire together to keep it from the ears of the public, because of the shame that it would attract. However, where it becomes necessary medical help is provided for the victim. The participant narrates an incident where a girl that was close to a Rev Father was raped by the Rev. Father. The Rev Father asked her to spend weekend with him, and she got raped by the Rev Father. The Mother of the girl never reported to any authority because she wants to maintain the relationship with the Rev Father. (IDI/Psychologist/ Eja Memorial Hospital Itigidi /February, 2021)

A community leader in Ekori who has had complaints and handled rape issues involving relatives in the community is of the opinion that:

It is difficult especially when the perpetrators is a family member of the victim. If the perpetrators is punished, it will still be the same family that will carry the burden of taking care of him in detention. The participant gave an instance of a man who raped his step daughter, the family members warned members of the community that if they hear anyone talking about the incident, such person will be reported to the police. (IDI/community leader/Ekori/February, 2021)

Another participant during an interview provided explanations that justify why rape incidents involving close family members are hardly reported:

Mostly it is the fear of the unknown, for instances, one of the cases was a father and a step-daughter, because they don't want the whole family to be embarrassed. Because incest is such a taboo, they had to conceal it to save the family's name. Do you think when a relative is the perpetrator of the crime, the family members will disclose the crime to the public? No, unless one of the members unconsciously say it out. (IDI/Teacher/Community Sec.Sch.Ugep /February, 2021)

Attitude of law enforcement agent and disclosure and help-seeking behaviour of rape victims

The findings of hypothesis three revealed that attitude of law enforcement agent does significantly influence disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria. This implies that, the rigorous requirement involved in producing authentic evidence of rape such as getting a medical report, as well as a police report within the shortest possible interval of any rape incident, makes disclosure and help seeking difficult. The study revealed that fear that the police may be unwilling to make an official report due to insufficient evidence makes rape survivors not to report the case. The study observed that culture of silence is aggravated among rape victim because of the humiliation and intimidation suffered by victims in the hands of police. It was further revealed that dismissive attitude within the police and inaccessible justice system makes it difficult for rape victim to report the incident to the police.

Also, the study showed that rape survivors find it difficult to report the matter because such cases are stagnated in court with numerous adjournments and later dismissed on technical ground by the court. This is in agreement with Rich and Seffrin, (2012) who studied police interviews of sexual assault reporters in United States. The study revealed that sexual assault is underreported in the United States because of fear of revictimization by criminal justice professionals. The qualitative data shows that a relationship exit between the attitude of law enforcement agents, disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims in Cross River State, Nigeria

A community leader, while supporting the position of this study, provided an explanation why most rape victims find it hard to report the incident to the law enforcement agents.

In her opinion, rape victims do not open up on their ordeal because the police or law enforcement agencies makes you feel like, it's all your fault. (IDI/Community leader / Ugep /February, 2021)

An excerpt from the view of a participant on how attitude of law enforcement officer influence disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims reveals that:

Even when the cases are reported to the police, the police will be the ones to discourage the complaint from taking the case further. The police will ask you to forget about the case that it will not go anywhere. Police officers prevent victims from taking up rape cases because they extort so much money from the rapists and ensure that the case did not see the light of the day. (IDI/Rape victim/ Ugep /February, 2021)

Another participant that was interviewed noted this thus:

We all know that, the police are in business and the highest bidder will always wins, except you meet an IPO who wants to use his innate conscience and allow justice prevail. Do you think the attitude of the police discourages people from reporting? Yes it is a strong reason because most victims are poor and the police get money from the perpetrators and eventually the case dies off. (IDI/Health worker/ General hospital Ugep /February, 2021)

Another respondent added as follows:

That the female IPO's handles rape cases better than their male colleagues. The moment a rape case is reported to a female IPO she gets very tenacious till the victim is punished. The respondent noted that delay in courts processes and police investigation in rape cases discourage victims from speaking up. Partly it is a factor, because the frustration the victims' family faced, the money involved and the rescheduling of the court actually made them to abandon the case. (IDI/community leader / Ekori /February, 2021)

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Despite the overwhelming evidence of rape at the public domain, it still remains a silent epidemic and a serious public health issue that is mostly underreported and unrecognized with many victims concealing their experiences of abuse. Despite serious deleterious effects of rape, most victims do not seek professional help. Although help-seeking behaviours differ across regions of the world, the findings of this study show that victims of rape in Cross River rarely report their experiences to formal sources and some do not seek help at all. The study identifies fear of

stigmatization, and victim relationship to perpetrator, as strong factors predicting disclosure and help seeking behaviour of victims in Cross River State, Nigeria. Fear of stigma, experiences of stigma and acts that suggests discrimination are recurring issues suffered by rape victims in selected communities in Cross River State. The study also reveals that victim's relationship with the perpetrator is another factor that predicts the disclosure and help seeking behaviour of rape victims. It was observed that rape from close family members is far more prevalent than strangers and it is the most traumatic and humiliating type of rape. This is because the incidents most times are not reported to law enforcement agents because it involves a close family member. There is need for a multi-dimensional approach but most importantly, there must be an awareness and an aggressive campaign against rape by CSOs, religious leaders and media outlets (both print and electronic media), while an incentive that would encourage and support victims to speak out should be put in place by government. Law enforcement agents at the various local government areas in Cross River should be trained on how to handle issues relating to rape and also encouraged to show empathy to rape victims and avoid the temptation of being judgmental by seeing victims as the cause of what happens to them.

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