

# **Perception of Postgraduate Students on the Early Reporting of Rape Related Cases: A Framework for Social Justice in Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The global prevalence of rape is alarming, especially in developing countries where the fear of victimization and stigmatization often make most rape cases go unreported and consequently, births post traumatic stress disorders [PTSD] for victim. The aim of this study therefore was to examine and identify the perceptions of postgraduate students on the early reporting of rape related cases as a tool for social justice. This study adopted a qualitative design utilizing 30 In-depth interviews (IDIs) conducted with male and female postgraduate students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka and the IDIs were analyzed in themes. Results from the study showed that the study participants perceived that most victims had no trust in the justice systems thus; they prefer to remain silent and save themselves from any form of blame or embarrassment by self reporting rae. Given the trauma and delay of case reporting, majority of the participants beleived that the time frame of case reporting should not deter justice for the victim and punishment for the perpetrator. The study concludes that since rape is a criminal offence that is punishable by law, victims should shun all forms of fear and seek justice for themselves by self-reporting rape cases or attempts.

**Keywords:** Rape, perception, early-reporting, social justice, Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

Rape is a worldwide phenomenon that often times leaves the victims victimized if they choose to speak up especially in third-world countries. Consequently, the fear of victimization and stigmatization often makes most rape cases go unreported. These rape victims only live through life with the trauma. In England, Wales and Australia, around one in five women have experienced sexual violence at least once during their lifetime. In United states of America, the national sexual violence survey similarly estimated that one in five women, along with one in 71 men, have been raped (Geddes, 2018). According to UK Home Office data, 46% of recorded rapes were reported on the day they took place, while 14% of people took more than six months to report that they had been assaulted. If the victim was a child, they were even more likely to delay case reporting. For example, just 28% of those aged under 16 reported the offence on the day it happened, while a third waited for longer than six months (Geddes, 2018). Eze (2013) pointed that rape and sexual assaults comes in different forms such as coerced sex, organized rape, sexual harassment au h as sex for grades or sed for jobs and other gratification, forced exposure to pornographic images or films etc. Whichever form rape occurs in is problematic and the effect is always detrimental to the victim. Most victims for fear of being blamed choose to remain silent on the matter while they suffer post traumatic stress disorders [PTSD] (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011; Gordon and Riger, 2011; Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher, 2019).

In a recent study, Gravelin, Biernat and Bucher (2019) observed that nearly 1 in 5 women in the United States will likely be assaulted. Anyone either a male or female can be raped. Rape is not peculiar to women alone neither is it peculiar to children alone as even adults get raped. Also, most victims were raped by close friends and family members who were supposed to protect them (Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, & Merrick, 2011). Moore (2018) observes that the number of people who report rape is on the increase but those convicted of the crime remains low. This shows that social justice systems are not living up to their responsibilities.

Globally, the justice system works differently, every country has their pattern of administering justice but yet there are still problems of injustice and difficulties in securing justice for those who have been raped or sexually assaulted (Moore, 2018). Also, most Africa countries are patriarchal in nature (World Economic Forum, 2017). The roles and less value attached to women rights easily leads to anyone assuming a rape victim especially a woman, should not seek for justice. Rotenberg (2017) in his study found that the longer the time period between the sexual assault and when it was reported to police, the more likely the incident was to drop out of the justice system before court. Rape, like other social, physical, medical and legal abnormality is preventable if persons are security conscious, if there is proper awareness and enlightenment and if the law punishes offenders of the crime. However, Eze (2013) observes that until the right institutional frameworks that handle authentic rape cases are established and are functioning, the phenomenon will not come to an end.

This institutional framework approach involves functional, skilled and synchronized services. It also includes the criminal justice system, the police, social services, and sexual assault services (Eze, 2013). They carry-out the duties of encouraging victims/survivors of sexual assault to break their silence by making freely available such services, which should be community based and the successful prosecution of perpetrators, will serve as a deterrent and hopefully prevent the next person from falling victim (Eze, 2013). This study adopted the Black (1976) Behavior of Law theory. Black describes and explains the conduct of law as a social phenomenon. Every law should be able to prevent tragedies such as rape. When such an act occurs also, the law should be capable of providing justice. Social workers and social justice providers attend to rape related cases. They bargain, direct, evaluate and work with risk cases such as rape everyday as they make decisions about the lives of rape victims and those vulnerable to rape. They are important to any society because they fight, protect and preserve life and the human rights of members of the society (Stanley, 2013; Warner, 2013).

Due to the sensitive nature of rape and its high level of occurrence, most scholars have carried out researches on the phenomenon. For instance, a review on the differences in victim blaming between stranger and acquaintance rape was carried out by Grubb and Harrower (2008) where they

combined stranger and acquaintance rape as types of sexual assault when discussing the influence of gender and perceived similarity on victim blame. Again, Eze (2013) studied the prevention of sexual assault in Nigeria. According to the study, public enlightenment, institutional framework, emphasis on primary prevention, pre-assault self-defense/assertiveness training, confronting the challenges and education were important tools for the prevention of sexual assault. Also, Chiazor, Ozoya, Udume and Egharevba (2016) also carried out a study on taming the rape scourge in Nigeria: issues and actions. Sadly, very few qualitative studies exist on early reporting of rape related cases from the purview of social justice in Nigeria, hence this study intends to add to the existing body of literatures. The study's objectives were to ascertain the perception of people on rape, to examine early reporting of rape and social justice and finally to itemize the possible solutions and preventive measures to rape.

## 2. Methodology

This study was carried out in May to July 2019. The quantitative research design was used because the study did not aim for generalization, rather, it sought an in-depth exploration of the views of post graduate students on early reporting of rape among victims as a framework for social justice in Nigeria (Bryman, 2016). Purposive sampling technique was utilized for data collection in order to make the recruitment process easy and for the right participants [post graduate students] to be selected (Ritchie et al, 2014). The tool for data collection was In-depth semi-structured interview and it helped the researchers gain an in-depth information on the subject of research using appropriate probing questions such as 'why is it', 'why not' etc and this gave the study the needed flexibility as a qualitative study.

The study population consisted of postgraduate students resident in Odili post graduate hostel of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 30 semi structured In-depth interviews were conducted in Odili hostel where majority of the postgraduate students are resident. With the consent of the participants, interviews were audio-recorded with a recording device and thereafter transcribed (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). Each transcript contained the interview number, sex, age range, department, programme type of the participants etc. To maintain confidentiality, all names were reported as pseudonyms and all identifiers in data were removed (Wiles et al, 2008). Participants were offered the option to refuse any question and to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences (British Society of Gerontology, 2012). Interviews took place in comfortable and suitable locations where the participants had agreed to meet.

## 3. Results

The socio-demographic results of the study respondents showed that more female populated the study and more younger persons aged 25-40 years dominated the study. Three themes were formulated from the study's objectives and quotations from the fifty conducted interviews were used as basis to the themes. The theme include: understanding of rape, rape and social justice and possible solutions and preventive measures.

### 3.1. Understanding of Rape

The participants understand that rape is a non-willful compliance to any form of sexual activity. Their understanding of rape is negative as it has numerous consequences on the victim and the perpetrator even as it is seen as a sacrilege. Underneath are responses from two participants on their understanding of what means to them.

*...hmmm rape is like committing a sacred act. God made sex pleasurable but when something as beautiful as that is done without consent then it is a sin against God and against humanity. So to me, rape is any sexual action done without seeking due consent of an individual before involving in such an act (35 years old; Female pg student)*

Additionally, this response adds something unique to what rape means:

*To have been raped is to be forced into a sexual relationship that leaves the victim ashamed and full of blames. The feeling of blame is as a result of such a person never wanting to engage in the action in the first place, hence the presence of negative feelings and self-blame towards the rape committed (28 years old; male pg student)*

The researchers probed to find out if respondents could marry rape victims and below are some of their responses:

*Rape is a bad omen me I cannot marry someone who is raped especially if everyone knows she was raped. When I am walking on the road people will start saying that see that man that married that rape victim. Do you know that a rape victim can give you infection? (26 years old; male pg student)*

Also, a 43 year old man also agreed that he cannot marry a rape victim. He gave his reasons below:

*Why will you ask me such a question? I can never be with someone who was raped by another man. Even if today my wife gets raped I will divorce her. I cannot do such.... Never let women be careful, no man wants second hand. Dress properly, avoid dark places and do what is right to avoid rape (43 years old; male pg student)*

### **3.2. Rape and Social Justice**

Under this section the researchers intended to find out the relationship between rape reduction and social justice respondents of this study were of the view that justice should be served to deter people from engaging in such acts. Since our major thrust for this study was finding out if reporting case on time should be the only criteria for social justice, under this theme we probed further to elicit more information. Thus responses from majority of the respondents showed that there are different reasons why someone may choose to report a rape case immediately or not but however once the victim is bold and ready to report the case, legal actions that serve justice should be offered to promote social justice which deters others from engaging in such actions. Eventhough, some respondents were of the view that reporting a rape case early is the only justification for justice to be served, some others gave religious views by emphasizing that in a country like Nigeria, reporting rape case brings shame, hence the victim should remain silent to avoid being blamed and stigmatized while leaving justice to God. Below Seven responses were extracted to buttress issues of this study. A postgraduate student revealed thus:

*Sexual assault of any form is a no no be it in marriage or between family members or a trust individual like a pastor, mentor or friend. Whilst we understand that most victims blame themselves for the action we should also out that into consideration to explain why a victim will report a case when it's convenient for them. However, whenever they are bold and comfortable to report a case, no one should blame such a person rather all the support they need should be given to arrest the culprit. Rape is traumatic until you experience it you won't appreciate their boldness to speak up whenever they are healed. In fact, speaking up is part of the healing process, so for someone to stay so long without talking about it is risky. Such a person would have contemplated suicide, suffered all forms of low self-esteem and blame (40 years old; female pg student)*

Furthermore, a 27 year old male postgraduate student said:

*People should be given the listening ear, proper care and attention when they speak up. I remember when I was twelve our maid then tried to rape me. I tried to tell my mum but she never believed me, it was until my younger sister complained that aunty Sonia touched her private part. My mum took that serious because she was a girl, they later sent her to the village but I knew how I felt when my mum didn't believe me. Let's all be sensitive to people whenever they speak up. (27 years old; male pg student)*

Still, a 29 year old male postgraduate student had another view to reporting rape and social justice:

*It is always good to report rape instantly. This will give the authorities what to work with. You cannot just wake up after 5 to 10 years to start claiming that you were raped... excuse me who does that? What proof will you use against the culprit? It's only if the person enjoyed the act then years later they just want to feel important then they come up with silly stories. If you are raped speak up don't hid it or lie just to punish someone for something you enjoyed (29 years old; male pg student)*

However, we furthered elicited the response of another participant who was of the opinion that early reporting and seeking of justice is good since it gives accurate information for prosecution. Below was her response:

*Anyone caught should serve the punishment. People should always report a rape case immediately o. Also, whenever they report any rape case the police and other important officials should wing to action. When justice is properly served the rate of rape cases will reduce. Seeking justice is good and of great important to humanity, so ill advise anyone raped to seek early justices. When you report a case early people will get the right information they need to prosecute the rapist (44 years old; female pg student)*

Additional response from a female student showed the state of Nigeria's justice system. She however opined that victim's justice should seek justice:

*Reporting a case problem can be tiring in a country like Nigeria. You may later end up been blamed for being raped but even if we don't trust the Nigeria justice system, I still think a lot can be done by them in giving people the right justice for their actions. So people should always report any sign of rape they see. No one should suffer from rape if we have a functioning justice system. People should report early enough to help them receive the right justice all things being equal (30 years old; female pg student)*

While others see the need to report a case on time, another respondent mentioned that justice should be turned to God alone and not the justice system. Below was His view:

*Let who ever has been raped turn to God for justice. He will always make those who have committed an offence pay for their deeds. The truth is Nigeria justice system will only end up worsening the condition. It is so shameful to tell someone you were raped. Since rape brings shame and stigmatization, let the victim remain silent to avoid being blamed and stigmatized (42 years old; male pg student)*

Finally, under rape and justice, this respondent gave a brief summary of what it entails. She mentioned that:

*Rape leaves a stigma that even if we serve justice there is still need to bring in professionals to help in the healing process of these victims. I was raped by someone I trusted so much. I lived in shock, I remember shouting out from my sleep due to horrible nightmares and the fear of being raped, every day I lived in fear and whenever I saw the rapist I felt like passing a dagger through his throat and letting him feel the pain I felt when I saw myself in the state he kept me. I was never able to report the case and I am telling you this in confidentiality now so please like you promised don't expose my weakness I just spoke up so others can know that rape is real and justice must be served. When I realized that it is affect how I relate with people especially the opposite sex, I decided to seek help. Although I have not even told my therapist what the reason for my seeking help is but I'm sure she will soon find a way around it. I am hoping that when I finally get healed and seek for justice that man will be prosecuted for his actions towards me (26 years old; female pg student)*

### **3.3. Possible Solutions and Preventive Measures**

Respondents gave their own views on the possible solutions and preventive measures of rape and reporting rape cases for social justice.

*Women who are the ones easily victimized should learn self-defense mechanism so as to fight and protect themselves from rapist. There should be proper awareness on no meaning no consent for any form of sexual contact. Children should be taught to safe when they are touched wrongly (37 years old; male pg student)*

Additionally a 29 year old female student opined thus:

*Government should organize workshop and training programmes for security personnel and social justice providers so they can know what to do and do it on time. This will help in reducing rape cases. (29 years old; female pg student)*

Also a 41 year old male student mentioned that:

*People should be bold to speak up on time. No one should be stigmatized. I think if the government has laws and punishment for those who stigmatize rape victims, and then people will be bold to speak up on rape and attempted rape. This will help people become out spoken (41 years old; male pg student)*

## **4. Discussion of Findings**

This current study examined perception of respondents on the early reporting of rape related cases: a tool for social justice. The researchers strongly affirmed that rape is an action that leaves the victim stigmatized that requires social justice. Our findings were related with other existing literatures to show our level of agreement or disagreement. Findings from this study showed that the reason why people fail to utilize social justice providers in Nigeria is due to their inability to trust the system and the resultant social stigma of being a rape victim. This study agrees with the findings of Ejim (2013). Ejim (2013) revealed that some policemen in Nigeria are fond of treating rape victims as though they are the offenders themselves and they also demand bribe in order to investigate rape cases, accuse the victims of consenting to the sexual intercourse with the rapists. This study also found that rape is tagged a “bad

omen”, most women who are raped face issues with getting married, they are always stigmatized. This finding points to the fact that women are always victimized and blamed for even being rape victims. This finding corroborates the findings of Chiazor, et al. (2016). Their finding revealed that women are blamed and stigmatized. They experience shame, guilt and self-blame about being raped. This assault prevents those raped from coming forward and pressing charges (Chiazor, et al., 2016). Our findings also found that most rape victims are victimized by people close to them and those they attach much value to. Our finding is in lieu with Udekwe (2013). Udekwe (2013) revealed that everyday girls and boys, women and men are sexually being abused, even by persons known to the victims, who perhaps shamelessly take undue advantage of such familiarity. Our findings also revealed that whenever a rape victim gets healed and is ready to report a rape case such an action should be honoured. But however, the findings showed that early reporting of any form of attempted rape or rape itself will go a long way in making social justice achievable. This finding is in congruent with that of Armatta (2018). Armatta’s (2018) finding outlined the reason why a rape victim may choose to report a rape early or years later. In conclusion, this study has established that rape is a dangerous act taken upon a victim that can actually leave the victim stigmatized and blamed if social justice is not served professionally.

## 5. Conclusion

It is our view that a problem this grave needs the right justice served to deter others from participating in this unwholesome act. Thus whether a victim reports a rape case today or years later when they sum up boldness to do so should not necessarily matter so long as there are proofs to seek social justice which leads to the prosecution of the offender. The study recommends that social actions and enlightenment programmes should be carried out against rape and rapists. Also, rapist and those caught attempting to rape should be exposed and punished for their actions to deter others. Government should also organize workshops and seminars for people involved in social justice. Also, to prevent stigmatization and blame, government should establish regulations and laws to protect rape victims so that they can boldly speak up. If these measures are put in place the society will function better than what we have now and issues of rape cases will be minute in the society.

### Study Instrument (In-Depth Interview Guide)

Introduction: exchange pleasantries, introduce yourself and ask the participant to also introduce themselves by their names, age and department of study. Supply participant information and consent form, then proceed to the questions and probing.

1. What do you understand by rape? (Probe for if they can marry a rape victim; Probe answers)
2. What are your views on rape and social justice? (probe: should people seek for justice or remain silent; Probe answers)
3. What are the possible solutions? (Probe to find out preventive measures to these problems)

### Acknowledgements

We thank the postgraduate students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka who gave consent to participate in this study and shared valuable information with us.

**Declaration:** The authors have no conflicting interest to report

**Funding:** The authors received no fund or grant for this research.

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