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## **EXAMINING THE TRENDS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND COERTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH STIs/HIV IN FEMALE ADOLESCENTS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

- **Sex abuse is a cruel and violent sexual act by a person who is perceived to hold power over another.**
- **Sexual abuse includes rape, sexual assault, sexual molestation, sexual harassment and incest.**
- **It can occur at home, school, work place, isolated places, cars, or public place.**
- **The perpetrators can be family members, boy friends, lecturers/teachers, community leaders, neighbours, uniformed men and strangers.**
- **Since sexual abuse is the exploitation of power, women, young girls and children are especially at risk and the violations can have lasting consequences on their sexual and reproductive health.**
- **Nonconsensual sex may be a major contributing factor to such reproductive health problems as unwanted pregnancy and its complications, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that can cause cervical cancer, infertility and trauma.**

- **Transmission of these infections will persist despite common STI/HIV prevention approaches of emphasizing sexual abstinence, faithfulness in relationships, and condom use – as long as non consensual sex remains wide spread.**
- **Too commonly, the behaviour of perpetrators, thoroughly interwoven into long-standing traditions and customs, is condemned.**
- **The stigma that many victims face plunges them into a resigned silence that hinders them from getting help and masks the scope of the problem.**
- **Thus, nonconsensual sex-accepted or merely overlooked – continues unabated, it's full magnitude, risk factors and physical and mental health consequences remain poorly understood, particularly in the developing world.**

## **REPORT TO AUTHORITIES**

- **The full extent of acquaintance rape, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual molestation and incest is not known.**
- **World health organization (WHO) estimates that overall prevalence of sex abuse is 25% for girls and 8% for boys although these figures differ with population studied and definitions used.**
- **Rape and coercive sex are used as weapons of war against women in situations of armed conflict throughout the world**
- **In South Africa, it is estimated that one million cases occur every year. One out of every 35 rapes is reported.**
- **In 1996, less than half of all reported rapes were referred to the courts, off these, less than 10% led to convictions.**
- **Eight out of every 10 women raped are poor and black.**
- **In Nigeria and other developing countries, rape is used by the police and security agents as a means of torture to extract confession from suspects in custody.**

- **There is serious obstacle to reporting and prosecution of rape in Nigeria especially if it has to do with police and security agents or men who are highly connected.**
- **Their victims face humiliation and intimidation while the investigations are hampered by corruption and incompetence.**
- **Whether abused by police, security forces, relatives or unknown persons in their homes and community, there are enormous difficulties faced by women and girls who are sexually abused in Nigeria.**
- **Women and girls rarely seek prosecution for fear of intimidation by the police and rejection by their families and community hence they prefer to protect their family names.**
- **On the legislative level, differences between Federal, State, Sharia and Customary law lead to uneven standards of justice and arbitrary decisions concerning the seriousness of the crime.**
- **Only estimated 10% of cases are ever being successfully prosecuted in Nigeria.**
- **Sexual harassment in Nigerian schools and work places appear to be under- researched and even less reported.**

- **The commission on the review of higher education in Nigeria (CRHEN) suggests that the phenomenon is gradually assuming a critical dimension.**
- **Students identified sexual harassment as being among the stressors hindering academic work in the universities.**
- **In the Nigerian judiciary, there is no case of sexual harassment in the record. Since there is no law, it becomes difficult for anybody to allege harassment.**
- **In Zimbabwe, Malawi and Ghana, sexual abuse of girls by teachers, older male pupils, and sugar daddies is largely accepted. Authorities may not act against it.**
- **Teachers are generally unwilling to report each other's sexual misconduct.**
- **In Uganda, women were raped by fleeing government troops in 1986. The world witnessed with horror the systematic use of rape in war-torn Rwanda, Bosnia, and more recently Kosovo.**
- **In Uwimaana, thousands of refugee women are raped or coerced into sex and often seek unsafe abortions to terminate unplanned and unwanted pregnancies. They face death or chronic complication when medical care is not available.**

## **LINKING CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE TO ADOLESCENT SEXUAL ABUSE**

**Over a long term, childhood sexual abuse appears to be associated with some adverse outcomes by means of two mechanisms. Such abuse has been linked to-**

- (a) Sexual risk-taking in adolescent, (b) Associated with later sexual victimization of women.**

**In both cases emotional harm caused by childhood sexual abuse appears to-**

- Undermine normal healthy psychological development that would enhance victim's ability to protect their sexual health.**
- Victims have reported guilt, anxiety and depression.**
- Feelings of worthlessness and powerlessness.**
- Inability to distinguish sexual from affectionate behaviour.**
- Difficulty in maintaining appropriate personal boundaries and inability to refuse unwanted sexual advances.**
- Start voluntary sex earlier.**
- Abuse alcohol and other drugs**
- Not use contraceptives**
- All these behaviours may increase risk of unintended pregnancy as well as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.**

## **OBJECTIVES**

**The primary objectives of this study are:**

- 1. To examine the trend of sex abuse and coercion in female adolescent in Lagos Nigeria.**
- 2. To know the association between sex abuse, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections in female adolescents**
- 3. To know whether factors like level of education, knowledge of STIs and HIV status influences sex abuse**
- 4. To know the relationship between sex abuse and other sexual practices**
- 5. To know the perpetrators of female adolescent sex abuse in Lagos Nigeria.**

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Study site:**

**The study was carried out amongst the in and out of school female adolescents in Lagos State, Nigeria.**

### **Study Population:**

**Four hundred respondents were interviewed. Their ages ranged from <11 to >26 years.**

### **Methods:**

**Data was collected from focus group discussion and individual interviews using structured questionnaire covering socio-demographic data, knowledge of STIs, knowledge of HIV status, knowledge and experience of sexual abuse. Number of cases reported to the authorities, number not reported, number withdrawn from authorities and why the cases were withdrawn, infections with STIs/HIV and pregnancies, who was responsible for the sexual abuse, other sexual practices, knowledge and use of condom, were evaluated.**

**Data was entered and analysed using EPI INFO 2002 Software (CDC, USA).**

## **RESULTS**

- **Females of age group 16-25 years are more at risk of sex abuse (p=0.05), figure 1.**
- **Female adolescents who have been abused were statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.0012$ ).**
- **A significant association was found between sex abuse and STIs/HIV ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.0000000$ ), figure 2.**
- **Rape is the commonest form of sexual abuse identified in this study ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.000000$ ), followed sexual assault ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.0000$ ), figure 3.**
- **Unknown persons (35.3%) seemed to have more prevalence as perpetrators of female adolescent sex abuse followed by male relatives (18.6%), figure 4.**
- **The difference in knowledge of HIV status, STIs, and educational level and sex abuse in female adolescents was statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.0000$ ).**
- **The female adolescents who were sexually abused and are involved in other sexual practices were not statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.341$ ), figure 5.**
- **The prevalence of psychological trauma in female adolescents who were sexually abused was statistical significant ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0.002$ )**

- **About 9% of the female adolescent refused to disclose the type of STIs/HIV they had after being sexually abused.**
- **There was no statistical significance found between forced early marriage and sex abuse ( $\chi^2_{0.05}=0062$ ).**

## **DISCUSSION**

- **The result showed that female adolescents of age bracket 16-25 years were at high risk of sexual abuse.**
- **An association was found between sexual abuse, HIV infections, other sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.**
- **The study also showed that abuse of female adolescents sexually is rife though mostly unreported in Nigeria.**
- **The implication of non-reporting and/or withdrawal of reported cases of sex violation and the inability to punish offenders to serve as deterrent to others could be attributed to the perpetuation of the criminal act in the community.**
- **Hence, it is imperative that parents and other stakeholders need to see this as a collective responsibility in ensuring that offenders are exposed and prosecuted accordingly.**

## **CONCLUSION**

- **Government, in collaboration with non-governmental organizations can help in creating awareness on sex abuse. Once the public is enlightened and empowered with adequate information relating to sexual violence, it is expected that the number of reported cases will soar.**
- **The Nigerian government should translate its international legal obligations towards women and girls into national law, policy and practice.**
- **Then the state and federal authorities will meet those obligations and offer real security and justice to women and girls in Nigeria.**