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**Edmund Ugochukwu
Ugwoegbu**
School of Theology and
Ministry Boston College,
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts,
United States.

Correspondence:
**Edmund Ugochukwu
Ugwoegbu**
School of Theology and
Ministry Boston College,
Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts,
United States.

Sexual Predation, Rape & Assault against Women; Key to Disability, Hiv/Aids, Abortion: Challenges and Effects.

Edmund Ugochukwu Ugwoegbu

Abstract

This paper explored sexual predation, Rape and Assault on women; key to Disability, HIV/AIDS & Abortion: Challenges and effects. This menace has been on the increasing side and has remained the key evil triumphing in the world today, due to the hegemonic patriarchal cultures that present men as polygamous/ superior to their wives and also subjugate women to the margin as properties to their husbands, thereby making them more vulnerable as preys to men in general and this leads to sexual predation of all kinds. Using the old testament in this analysis, it was observed from the biblical narrative of the adulterous woman brought to Jesus, that the cultural perspective of polygamous nature of men played a significant role in promoting sexism with androcentric mentality of women being stoned to death when found guilty of adultery and nothing is done to the partner (man), but Jesus's judgmental questions and statement disrupted that patriarchal Jews culture. It is same today with African men from countries such as Kenya, where the parliament passed bill on polygamy in 2014, South Africa where polygamy is legal, Cameroun and Nigeria, particularly Northern part of Nigeria where the Islamic laws presented polygamy as legal. These instances subjugated the woman who is bound culturally to one man while men are free to marry numerous wives together with concubines and mistresses, to gender-based violence, predation, rape and other forms of sexual harassment. This paper discovered that the church as a body has condemned and preached against all these kinds of sexual harassment against women and so it recommends that the church should try and practicalize what they preach/condemn by mitigating against all forms of cultural suppression, aggression and oppression of women in general.

Keywords: Sexual predation, women, patriarchal culture, Rape, polygamy

Introduction

In a world where male power dominates in most cultures, predation against women is increasing. Sexual predation against women is one of the key evils triumphing in the world today. There are cases of rape, assault and harassment against women as a result of hegemonic patriarchal cultures. These cultures subjugate women and push them to the margin thereby making them more vulnerable than ever. Because of these vulnerability women become preys to men and this leads to sexual predation of all kinds, causing diseases and affecting women negatively.

Sexual predation/rape/assault on women which continue to challenge theological bioethics and the Church in general. This study looked at the two primary cultures influencing androcentric mentality in Africa: The Biblical culture and the African traditional culture and it further expose predation against women in Africa in general, and Nigeria in particular. Thereafter it highlighted the consequences of predation on women, which in most cases are disability, transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STDs and unwanted pregnancy/abortion.

Patriarchy and the African Woman: Looking into Cultural Influences on African Men

Sexual predation, violence, rape and the dehumanization of the 'woman' is traceable to two major cultural influences on the African man. The Biblical culture and the African traditional foster patriarchal incentives in African men. Both cultures undermine the identity of women,

equating her to mere property of the man especially when it has to do with her sexuality.¹ They are both sexist and hegemonic cultures, which fail to recognize that the woman is a complete creature in her own right so it employed the Old Testament conception of the woman together with the unwritten African cultural understanding of the woman.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament has a history of relegating women to the margins though there are instances where women played important roles. Women were not considered to have their own rights. They, more often than not, depended on the rights or directives of their husbands. The right of the woman was dependent on the man under whose authority they were placed.² The woman's existence depended on males' powers and this limited women. Choices to better their lives were limited as they were sandwiched in the patriarchal culture in which they found themselves.

The Old Testament contains ambiguous stories, tales and the likes which purportedly help to promote sexism and an androcentric mentality in the world today. The law of the Hebrew Bible on non-coveting a brother's wife treats women as property. It simply makes men understand that women are properties belonging to other men and should not be tampered with. It is a biblical law but, in essence, it fuels on a hyper level the superiority mentality of most African men. It is not just African men, but men in general, both within the society and in the Church. This is one of the key roots of predation against women as most men, especially in marital unions, see their wives as their property. Women who were suspected of adultery were subjected to harsh treatment to prove their innocence. If found guilty, the women were stoned to death. The Biblical narrative of the adulterous woman brought to Jesus tells a lot about this cultural perspective (Jn 8:1-11). Their culture makes them bring this woman to Jesus; nevertheless, Jesus' mission is to fulfill the Law and he handles this case to the amazement of the patriarchal Jews. The question I always ask is: Where was the man who committed adultery with this woman? Nothing is/was said about this man, let alone whether the woman consented, but she suffers because she had no identity. It is the same today as African men will always insist that man is by nature polygamous. This is evident in the Customary Courts in Nigeria, and the Islamic Laws in the Northern part of Nigeria and South Africa where polygamy is legal. There are many other cultures in Africa where polygamy triumphs. A typical example is the passing into bill of polygamy by the Kenyan parliament in 2014. These instances subjugate the woman who is bound culturally to one man while the men are free to marry as many wives as possible, not excluding concubines and mistresses of different kinds, notwithstanding the woman's consent. The subjugation of women as a result of this masculine power leads to gender-based violence, predation, rape and other forms of sexual harassment against women. In the Old Testament, the "commoditization" of women is

also evident in stories of military exploits.³ Teresia Mbari Hinga notes that in wars with neighboring communities, women are taken as booty, along with sheep and goats.⁴ She goes further to point out that in a particular occasion, a father (Lot) prefers to give over his two daughters to the mob of the city of Sodom in order to save his two guests from being sodomized (Gen 19:8). These texts depict terror.⁵ Critical biblical hermeneutic stresses that these ideas are patriarchal inventions and never a divine mandate. Patriarchal Jews prayed in thanksgiving to God every day for creating them men and not women, gentiles nor slaves. In the ancient Judeo-Christian setting, women, gentiles and slaves were the most abused and marginalized groups. This abuse continues to the present and is a key factor in the predation against women.

In my native Nigerian culture, women are seen as subordinates to men. There is a commoditization of women. For a marriage to be traditionally solemnized, the man pays a bride price named by the family or parents of the bride. Thereafter, she belongs to her husband, who takes complete charge over her and may manipulate her life as per his whims and caprices. Therefore, she is considered to have lesser rights. This presents the African man as a sexist, who wants to be seen as superior to the woman. Indications and instances of such denigration of women are enormous in biblical contexts as well as traditional African cultural settings. Many men in my locality defend wife battering with all their power and energy insisting that, in marriage, they have procured their wives completely and should not be tutored on how to handle their wives. In some cases where the woman is the bread-winner in the family, their abilities become an issue. Most men are uncomfortable comprehending the fact that their wives are economically more successful than they are. In a recent case, a husband insisted that his wife should make all business papers available or make sure she registers everything in his name because she has no right to properties, not even when she worked hard to earn them. Patriarchy has eaten into the bone marrow of most African men the idea that to be a woman is simply to be less human.

In the African setting, women are sidelined in the control of the means of production. In most cases, the woman is relegated to the production of children which the average African man sees as the major purpose of God's creation of women. This is also rooted in the ancient Jewish culture where the women function as child bearers in order to continue the family line. In most cases, male children are preferred to female children. As Mary Evans notes, "At times, the wife is seen merely as a means of obtaining children, for to every Israelite to have children, especially boys who would carry on his line, was vitally important."⁶ This is not different from the traditional African/Nigerian culture where a man prefers male to female children. In cases where there are more females than males, the father of the home could decide to give the girls into early marriages as to make way for the boys. The father also

¹ See Mary J. Evans, *Woman in the Bible: An Overview of the crucial passages on women's roles* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press 1983), 25.

² Ibid.

³ See Teresia Mbari Hinga, *African Christian Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 177.

⁴ See *ibid.*

⁵ See *ibid.*

⁶ Evans, *Woman in the Bible*, 25.

decides to educate his male children instead of the females. This anchors the belief that the girls are meant for marriage and eventual procreation; hence, educating them is a waste of resources.

This article proceeded further by discussing predation against women because it has already elucidated that the patriarchal roots that hold immense influence on African men are situated in the biblical patriarchal culture and the African traditional culture. Both cultures nurture the cultural traits of the African man, making women prey to them. It also considered how sexual predation and rape against women challenge theological bioethics and the Church in general.

Sexual Predation/Rape/Harassment and Assault against Women

Predation against women remains one of the key evils that are triumphing in many streets in Africa. Beginning from Nigeria to Cameroon, South Africa, and Ghana to numerous other African countries, it has become a menace to society that women can no longer walk the streets without been afraid of being sexually harassed. Violence against women continues to climax. As the days go by as does the inability of state governments to put structures in place that could help to protect the common woman on the street. Women are vulnerable and they continue to fall victims to predation even from people they never thought would attack them. This causes many women to limit their movements by becoming more conscious of the environment in which they find themselves.

In Nigeria for instance, predation against women has become the order of the day. The kidnapping of over 200 young girls in Chibok by Boko Haram (a radical Islamic group) on the 14th of April, 2014 and the inability of the Nigerian government to rescue those girls in due time to avoid their sexual oppression, is a tragic example of the violation of women in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large. The Nigerian government, the African Union, and the Catholic Church's inability to employ all necessary routes to free those young women in a timely manner evidences the plight of women in our world today. Boko Haram abducted over 200 girls, took them to the Sambisa Forest in northern Nigeria, some for over a year, others for 7 and 8 months. These young girls were forced into marital unions with these terrorists, were raped, and had to struggle with unwanted pregnancies and STDs. The inability of the Nigerian government, the African Union and the Catholic Church to stop it, exposes three aspects of violence against women: the social and religious sanction of violence against women and the role of masculinity.⁷ This situation challenges the church to get more involved in advocating for women, especially those whose rights have been infringed upon by the male dominated class.

In Nigeria, rape emerges from a masculine possessive and dominated culture. There is a rape culture in Nigeria but unfortunately, only a few rapes are being recorded and prosecuted. The inability to record these atrocities is

⁷ Nontando M. Hadebe, "Advocate for Life: A Kairos Moment for the Catholic Church in Africa to be a Guardian, Sustainer, and Protector of Life," in Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, ed., *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican II*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016), 218.

backed up by patriarchal culture which inhibits most victims from speaking out. Rape is all about power; masculinity over femininity. The men find easy defenses while the women are rather stigmatized and mocked by the community. One of the popular Nigerian online newspapers laments the high-powered rape and predation of different kinds in Nigeria which go unreported. Activists used the overwhelming demonstration in Delhi, India, protesting for the protection of women after a young medical student was gang raped by 23 men on December 16th, 2012, to ask questions about cover ups and silence that meet cases of rape, sexual assault and the likes in Nigeria.⁸ The woman was powerless, severely beaten, gang raped and was thrown out of a moving bus in Delhi.⁹ She was rushed to the hospital and eventually passed on December 29th, 2012. People marched on the streets of Delhi and other cities in India protesting this ugly violence. We can ask: can people truly march in Nigeria as they did in India? If they do, will the culprits of rape be incarcerated? In some cases, this might happen, but in others it will not. Because of male power, the victim is silenced; a high-level of proof is demanded from her and her vulnerability and its effects are disregarded.

In Nigeria, the experience is that the victim of rape becomes the accused as masculine powers begins to question the woman's clothing and why she had to dress the way she did. The woman's attire, her clothing choices, as well as her being in general become "a problem" and no crime is attributed to the rapist. In solemn ways, the rape victim is tacitly silenced and suffers this further trauma. When rapes are prosecuted, the severity of such atrocious acts is mitigated and perpetrators are even considered as "champions" in what was supposed to put them behind bars. Explicitly, the Nigerian rape culture excuses masculine power over feminine powerlessness thereby making an abnormal sexual assault on a woman look normal. In a rape culture as seen in Nigeria, rape is as common as death and in most cases seems like little or nothing. Gender-based violence is seen as a way of life by both men and women, though women always pay the price. Any rape culture victimizes the victim of rape and in most cases makes the victim believe that she is the primary reason for the rape. The rape is blamed on the victim of the assault.

In the book *Transforming Rape Culture*, Emilie Buchwald *et al.* observe that any society that does not rebuke sexual violence ends up creating a rape culture. This is the case in Nigeria where sexual violence permeates the streets of all the major cities. She notes,

In a rape culture both men and women assume that sexual violence is a fact of life, inevitable as death or taxes. This violence, however, is neither biologically nor divinely ordained. Much of what we accept as inevitable is in fact

⁸ "Nigeria has a rape culture too: Protests against sexual violence in India mark a significant shift in attitudes, but why is there silence when it happens in Lagos?," *The Guardian*, posted January 14, 2013.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/14/nigeria-rape-india-culture>

⁹ "Indian Victim of Gang Rape Dies in Hospital at Singapore," *The Guardian*, posted December 28, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/28/indian-gang-rape-dies-singapore>

the expression of values and attitudes that can change. More than half of all reported rapes are committed by someone the survivor knows. Once we as a society take in the meaning of that fact, we will begin to understand the deeper issue of power, sexuality, and gender relationships surrounding sexual violence.¹⁰

This is a clear depiction of a typical Nigerian understanding to sexual violence against women and a deeper understanding of the power at play is important. Melissa McEwan further recognizes the atmosphere of inquisition of the victim within a rape culture. According to her, "Rape culture is refusing to acknowledge that the only thing a person can do to avoid being raped is never be in the same room as a rapist. Rape culture is avoiding talking about what an absurdly unreasonable expectation that is, since rapists don't announce themselves or wear signs or glow purple."¹¹ There is no way to identify a rapist until he begins to assault his victim. The rapist could be a trusted friend, uncle, brother or even one's biological father or stepfather.

A father once lamented that when you leave your child in the home she is not safe. And in the street, she is not safe. And in the school, she is not safe.¹² There is nowhere she can walk and be safe. This is a community leader's lament in Soweto, South Africa. It is the same situation in Nigeria. Girls are afraid somebody in a car will stop them and say 'get in.' When they walk in the street they are raped by men with guns. Sexual abuse happens so much that some students stop going to school.¹³ This is the plight of most females in Nigeria.

Therefore, the responsibility is on the Nigerian society to stand up and challenge the rape culture. This is not the responsibility of the government alone. The Church, through prophetic voices, should also rise to challenge the entrenchment of rape culture.

It is true that not all men are involved in acts of violence. Nevertheless, men account for 95 percent of physically violent actions globally.¹⁴ Statistically, in 2013 according to the *Nigeria Guardian* online, 1788 cases of rape were recorded by the Nigerian Police and 1827 were recorded in 2015. In these cases, only 18 convictions have been recorded.¹⁵ Each year the number of sexual assault victims continues to increase but convictions continue to be low. In Lagos State, Nigeria, rape is rampant. The Domestic Violence Response Team records about 1274 minors (2-9 years) who were assaulted and raped. Likewise, 1224 people were also raped with ages between 18 and 45. In this survey in Lagos State, the majority of the offenders are

men. Most recently, *Guardian Express* noted that between January and March 2018, about 306 rape cases against women have been recorded. Before this, in 1985 DANSANDA, the police newsletter, recorded 2,796 cases of rape notwithstanding that rapes are barely reported to the police.¹⁶

In the West, the frequency of rape occurrence is not quite different from the Global South. According to Rape, Abuser, and Incest National Network, one in six women and one in every thirty-eight men have been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetimes. Approximately, about 293,000 people are sexually assaulted in the United States every year.¹⁷ From these statistics, this article asserts that in every Christian gathering in the church, there must be victims of rape present and this menace rape is a trauma for women. It challenges the church and the society. These challenges become a problem to theological bioethics and global health at large.

Disability

Sexual assault and rape diminish a woman's dignity. Experiences like rape come with traumatic effects on its victims. Rape violates the woman and affects her most intimate self. Rape can cause a complete disintegration of a woman's being, which makes the woman see herself as no longer a whole person. Her physical and spiritual being have been invaded¹⁸ and destroyed. Rape can cause mental and emotional disability. A victim of rape can suffer low self-esteem, depression or alcohol and drug abuse. The trauma of rape and assault can often lead to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is a disorder that evolves after a person experiences a traumatic or life changing events which are exceedingly stressful. These events begin to play out in the person's memory. They come back with flashbacks and can make the person panicky and anxious. In writing about PTSD Jon G. Allen explains that, "Naturally, PTSD sufferers attempt to avoid stirring up these painful traumatic memories, but they remain highly anxious, and their avoidance blocks the possibility of coming to terms with the trauma. Healing entails mentalizing, making these memories emotionally bearable."¹⁹ PTSD is a threatening disorder and has been characterized as a key anxiety disorder. It is a reaction emanating from a major emotional traumatic stress and could lead to mental failure, especially in Nigeria and Africa where mental health specialists are still lacking. When this situation is not well handled, it could lead to death and many rape victims have resorted to suicide in the

¹⁰ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth, eds., *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2005), xi.

¹¹ Melissa McEwan, "Rape Culture 101," <http://www.shakesville.com/2009/10/rape-culture-101.html> October 9, 2009.

¹² See Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Violence Against Women in South Africa: State Response to Domestic Violence and Rape* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), 55.

¹³ See *ibid.*

¹⁴ See Hadebe, *Advocates for Life*, 218.

¹⁵ See Chidirim Ndeche, Njideka Agbo, "Rape in Nigeria," July 15, 2008. <https://guardian.ng/life/countering-rape-culture-in-nigeria/>

¹⁶ See Ifi Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess Daughters of Imperialism: African Women, Culture, Power and Democracy* (New York: Zed Book, 2000), 143.

¹⁷ See National Network, "Frequency of Sexual Assault, Rape, Abuse, and Incest," <https://rainn.org/getinformation/statistics/sexual-assault-victims>.

¹⁸ See Traci C. West, "The Harms of Sexual Harassment," in Mary Jo Iozzio and Patricia Beattie Jung, eds., *Sex and Gender: Christian Ethical Reflections*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 97.

¹⁹ Jon G. Allen, *Coping with Trauma: Hope Through Understanding* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing Inc., 2005), 171.

past. In most cases, the suffering is enormous as many victims struggle with life threatening genital and non-genital injuries. One of the things the Church in Nigeria and Africa can do to help rape victims is to train priests, religious women and lay people in mental health counselling and set up clinics where rape victims can find safety and healing. The lack of mental health professionals in our dioceses in Africa continues to impact negatively on rape victims who depend on the Church for rehabilitation.

The 1992 study of rape survivors conducted by the Hillbrow Medico-Legal Center in South Africa recorded that 40% of victims sustained genital injuries. Another 40% sustained lacerations, bruises, abrasions and fractures.²⁰ This report notes that the risk of spreading and contracting sexually transmitted disease during rape is high.²¹ Unwanted pregnancies, abortions and HIV/AIDS are possible outcomes of rape. In reflecting on the mental/emotional disability and harms associated with rape, I will take a brief look at rape in a conflict/war situation and at marital rape. War Security forces are known to have taken advantage of crises and war situations to prey on women. In most war zones, masculine powers are used to oppress women. Many Biafran women rape survivors from the Nigeria civil war still share their unrecorded stories of assault. In a bid to direct the younger generation on the dark side of war, they narrate stories of how they were raped by the military. I remember my grandfather telling me to pray that Nigeria witnesses no other war, and when I asked why he told me that it was a war of rape. I have always heard from my young days that rape is a tool of war.

In Guinea, the reality is not different as members of the presidential guard, police, and gendarmerie sexually assaulted and mutilated dozens of women. In the bid to disperse opposition demonstrators in late September 2009,²² security forces took advantage of the situation to rape and prey on women. It is the same thing in Kenya as security forces took advantage of the crisis during the 2008 disputed presidential elections to mutilate, rape and gang rape women. After investigation, it is believed that these crimes were perpetrated by security forces, humanitarian workers and other people on the basis of ethnicity, political affiliation and opportunistically.²³ All rape is bad but to be raped by security forces who are supposed to protect lives and properties is devastating. I am considering the mental/psychological and emotional state of the rape survivors from the instanced countries. I do not think they will trust security forces again because of the traumatic and emotional stress which they inflicted on them.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, records show that about 1,100 rapes were committed each month against women and children during the time of war. The statistics show that about 36 women and children were raped every

day.²⁴ Security forces including the National Police, the Army and other illegal non-statal armed groups committed about 81 percent of rape and assaults against women and children. The attacks on women were gender-rooted as the security forces claim their masculinity by preying on these women. They inflict terrible physical and psychological injuries. These women were mutilated by their aggressors in order to leave a lasting and ineradicable image on the women to show they were violated. This mutilation becomes a badge of shame for such women.²⁵

The worst part of it is the injury inflicted on families because of rape. Sometimes husbands and children are forced to be present as their wives and mothers are raped before them. Women have become infected with HIV and some of them unknowingly infect their husbands thereby multiplying the number of HIV/AIDS patients. In South Africa, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Angola, and Somalia and more recently in Southern Cameroon, cases of militarized rape and other kinds of predation against women abound. In all conflict zones, it is the women with their little children who suffer the most.

Moreover, we need to consider the mental/psychological and emotional disabilities that emanate from rape. Women who are raped during times of war and conflict will eventually suffer PTSD as a result of their traumatic experiences. Another terrible face of rape that can traumatize its victim is marital rape.

Marital rape

In Nigeria, one of the key predations that causes emotional and psychological disability on women is wife battering. Wife battering is the oppression of women by their intimate partners. It's embedded with many other abuses: beating, verbal abuse, sexual violence and intimate partner rape. The after-effects of battering replicates in the physical and mental state of the victim. In quoting Copleton, December Green notes that "the consequences include physical and mental pain and suffering, disfigurement, temporary and permanent disabilities, miscarriage, maiming, and death."²⁶ In Nigeria, during brutal assaults many women have been disfigured by their husbands or by persons with whom they shared intimate relationships.

As a pastoral worker in Nigeria, I witnessed numerous cases of domestic violence where the brutalization of women leads to terrible consequences. The male dominant culture makes these women silent to avoid blame because this culture implicitly supports husbands to brutalize their wives as a means of exercising their authority. A woman shared that she could not report the case to the police because the police will tell her to obey her husband and would not do much for her. It became clear to me that her

²⁰ See Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Violence against Women in South Africa*, 57.

²¹ See *ibid.*

²² See Alexis Arieff, "Sexual Violence in African Conflicts," in Jordan A. Prescott, Adrian M. Madsen eds., *Sexual Violence in Africa's Conflict Zones* (New York: Novena Science Publishers, 2011), 9.

²³ See *ibid.*

²⁴ See "Testimony of Ambassador Melanie Verveer (Ambassador at large for Global Women's Issues at the time of this report in 2009), Assistant Secretary Esther Brimmer, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Philip Carter, before the U.S. Senate Subcommittees on African Affairs and Human Rights, Democracy and Global Women's Issues," in Jordan A. Prescott et al, *Sexual Violence in Africa's Conflict Zones*, 46.

²⁵ See *ibid.*

²⁶ December Green, *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women's Responses* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), 25. [Add the reference concerning Copleton.]

friend had the same problem and the police would not do much after she reported the situation to them. The Church becomes a place of refuge for battered women who hold onto the community support from fellow women, especially those who suffered a similar fate with them. However, in these churches (both Catholic and others), pastors continue to emphasize the need for men to provide for their families while women should always be submissive to the authority of their husbands.

There is a myth being perpetrated in the world that women invite battering from their husbands. This myth continues to promote victim blaming in Nigeria. The truth is that the culture is fashioned in such a way as to make it unsafe for women to leave abusive relationships. It is a culture based on superiority and inferiority, where women are subjugated because they are inferior to men. A culture of inequality, oppression and marginalization of women. Sometimes, the role of pastors, so-called Men of God or male religious instructors suggest a complete support for the men who abuse their wives. Green records a case where an abused woman reported being assaulted to her religious instructor in South Africa seeking help. The response of the instructor was appalling. The woman narrated her story: "He was a respected and prominent member (of a religious organization) on campus and lived in a nearby residence. He beat me regularly (over a number of months) ... I eventually told my religious instructor, who told me I shouldn't provoke him... and should pray for forgiveness."²⁷ In Nigeria as in South Africa, the male power is obvious and sometimes gains support from ignorant religious leaders.

Marital rape is the extreme of wife battering and assault against women in Nigeria. Especially in the Southeastern part of Nigeria, most men believe that they have a right to their wife's sexuality. Most men refuse to admit the possibility of marital rape. They insist that a woman should always be available whenever her husband wants intimacy. This understanding or assumption emanates from a presumed male authority over women. This reality makes it difficult to have accurate statistics of the women who have been raped in marriages. A study conducted at Ubakala in South eastern Nigeria suggests that 80% of women have been abused by their husbands. This study shows that 80% of men battered their wives at one time or the other and 21% of women have been forced to have sex against their wish.²⁸ The understanding that wives should be available to their husbands makes it difficult for these women who have been battered and assaulted to speak out as they would not be taken seriously. These experiences are nasty and affect the psychological state of the victims. Many women in Nigeria suffer emotional and anxiety related disorders because of living in abusive marriages.

Having looked at rape and the possibility of causing PTSD, which is a major consequence of the disability rape victims live with, I now consider abortion. Abortion is another terrible mishap which is as a result of an unwanted pregnancy after rape.

²⁷ Ibid., 26. The author refers to Human Rights Watch 1995, 48. [Please complete the bibliographic reference.]

²⁸ See Daniel Jordan Smith, "Modern Marriage, Masculinity, and Intimate Partner Violence in Nigeria," in Kersti Yllo and M. Gabriela Torres, eds., *Marital Rape: Consent, Marriage, and Social Change in Global Context*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 46.

Abortion

Abortion is defined as the termination of the pregnancy before birth. The controversy among theologians has always been: when does life begin? Another question that comes up is: is it ok to have abortion after rape? If yes, why and if no, why?

The number of known rape related pregnancies are not high considering that most rape victims do not report their victimization. The process for reporting a rape begins with a visit to a hospital so that medical professionals can examine the victim. In most cases, women can suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, genital and non-genital traumas and a small percentage could become pregnant. In some cases, rape victims who conceive would want to terminate the pregnancy because of the burden of caring for a child conceived through rape while others because of social stigma. If rape victims eventually decide to terminate the pregnancy, what is the morality of the action? What does the church say about abortion after rape or abortion in general?

The Catholic Church insists that life begins at the moment of conception and life once conceived must be protected with the utmost care; abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.²⁹ The Church teaches that abortion of any kind is an abominable act and should be resisted in all its forms. It is a call for absolute respect and protection of every human life from the moment of conception.³⁰ This is to say that even for rape victims, once it is proven that conception has taken place, every kind of medication that would terminate the fetus' life should never be administered, nor any intervention to the same effect should occur because that amounts to killing a human life. Every modern embryology textbook states that once fertilization has occurred, a new human life exists, a separate and distinct individual with its own DNA.³¹ Once there is no obstacle to this fertilized egg, it develops to maturation as it has all it takes to do this and has every right as a human person. Yes, the tiny blastocysts that seem like an ordinary clump of blood when looking at it, is actually a human being.

Rape is undoubtedly the most grievous crime a man can commit against a woman.³² Because of the nastiness of this crime, many theologians make exceptions on the judgement they pass when confronted with cases. The handling of abortion cases after rape has been politicized. Nevertheless, the conceived child of a rape victim, though conceived in an excruciating way, has the right to life. Abortion in the case of rape should never be an option, no matter how difficult the victim finds it. Even in the case of rape, abortion is terribly tragic and objectively wrong.³³ The attempt to terminate the life of an unborn child conceived through rape is an aggression to the unborn child. The

²⁹ See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, *Donum Vitae*, (February 22, 1987), § 23, at the Holy See, <http://www.vatican.va>.

³⁰ See *ibid.*

³¹ See Erika Bachiochi, "The Uniqueness of Woman: Church Teaching on Abortion," in Erika Bachiochi, ed., *Women, Sex and the Church: A case for Catholic Teaching* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2010), 38.

³² See *ibid.*, 50.

³³ See *ibid.*

rapist is to be blamed and not the poor unborn child. In some cases, victims see the abortion process as reigniting the pains of rape, while many others decide to keep the child as a way of finding healing differently through the birth of the child.

In Nigeria, abortion is one of the most dangerous and life-threatening experiences any woman can face. Abortion is not legal in Nigeria except in a very extreme medical situation. In such extreme medical situations, it is allowed to save a woman's life. Most people who procure abortion do so clandestinely and sometimes they rely on local, untrained medicine healers. This increases mortality rate and causes disability. In Nigeria, the most common cause of abortion is not rape but unintended pregnancies among those of reproductive age. Mustapha Adelaja, a researcher on abortion related issues in the Northern part of Nigeria, notes "Induced abortion is not only widespread in Nigeria but is also provided and practiced in a number of different settings, from traditional medical practitioners, herbalists, and private practicing clinicians to modern pharmacists."³⁴ Most of these people who help women to procure abortion are not trained medical personnels. Mustapha goes to say that: "The consequences of these clandestine abortions are grave and can be life-threatening, often leading to maternal death. Abortions account for 20%–40% of maternal deaths in Nigeria."³⁵ Abortion continues to be unacceptable except for extreme medical reasons in Nigeria.

The Church continues to counsel and advice rape victims to give birth to their babies and give them away for adoption if they feel the burden of caring for an unwanted child would be too much to bear. For those who can embrace the child that comes after rape, this choice will call them to live the Christian virtue of sacrifice, seeing the image of God in every human being and recognizing that every life is sacred? Personally, I say an absolute no to abortion after rape because the conceived child notwithstanding the circumstances of conception, has a right to life. The Catholic Church in Nigeria should map out programs that would support women who have been abused by men. Attention should be given to those who decide to abort due to social stigma attached to caring for a child conceived through rape. In so far as the Church does not encourage abortion, sometimes people are pressured to make wrong decisions. I now consider how HIV/AIDS is another consequence of rape in our society today.

HIV/AIDS

Sexual predation on women can affect their health in negative ways. Women who were victimized are known to have suffered, emotional, psychological and physical health hazards. HIV/AIDS is one of the sexually transmitted diseases that rape victims could suffer and this continues to be of concern to global health. What could be done to prevent the spread of this illness? In Nigeria, studies have shown that sexual predation on women has the capacity and capability to increase the spread of HIV/AIDS. By 2010, it was predicted that about 5 million Nigerians would have

died from HIV/AIDS infection.³⁶ So many Nigerian children have been orphaned and the rate of the spreading of the disease is alarming. Most vulnerable to contacting this infection are sex workers and many unborn children whose would be fathers and mothers are already HIV positive. Other young people who live in abject poverty with no access to good healthcare facilities, truck drivers and those displaced by armed conflicts are most vulnerable to contacting HIV/AIDS.

Polygamy and infidelity are also major issues in Nigeria. Many men with a history of predation end up infecting their wives. In an oppressive culture, women who suspect their husbands of being HIV positive could still be coerced into having sex with their husbands and get infected. What can the Church do to mitigate sexual predation against women?

Mitigating Predation against Women

In conclusion, the Declaration of Commitment for HIV/AIDS, defined it as a human rights and security issue. Among its priorities, the Declaration encourages the empowerment of women, care for AIDS orphans, monitoring of drug prices and AIDS education.³⁷ The first thing the Church should do in promoting HIV/AIDS prevention is to facilitate AIDS education. The Catholic Bishops should promote programs geared toward education and empowerment of women. The rural women are the first priority, especially those who do not have any formal education.

To curb predation against women in Nigeria, Africa, and the world at large, the education of girls should be mandatory in all the dioceses. From early age, the education of girls helps the growing women to hold on to her rights in a male dominated world. The set back to patriarchal mentality is that the Church is male dominated and the cries of vulnerable women meet silence in the face of patriarchy. By using her prophetic voice and commitment to promote education the Church should encourage and empower people to address and remove everything that causes gender inequality, especially what infringes on the rights of women. The Church needs to be in complete solidarity with the plight of women in the world, who in any case comprise about 50 percent of the global population.³⁸ Is the Church involved in mitigating predation against women? Yes, the Church is involved in mitigating this social ill. I do challenge the church in Nigeria and Africa to do more.

The Church's teaching on liberation theology and the preferential option for the poor reminds us that, "it is important that numerous Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its fullness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom, and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed, and persecuted brothers and

³⁴ Mustafa Adelaja Lamina, "Prevalence of Abortion and Contraceptive among Women Seeking Repeat Induced Abortion in Western Nigeria," *Journal of Pregnancy* (2015). <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/jp/2015/486203/>
³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Christian Iyiani, Tony Binns, Pat Shannon, "Talking Past Each Other: Towards HIV/AIDS Prevention in Nigeria," *International Social Work* 54, no. 2 (2011): 259-271.

³⁷ See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Theological Bioethics: Participation, Justice and Change* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 162.

³⁸ See Hinga, *African Christian Feminist*, 180.

sisters.”³⁹ The Church continues to emphasize respect for the dignity of every human being. In doing this, I advocate strongly that the Church addresses sexism, which is overwhelming, especially in the Nigerian society and Church. In doing this, victims of sexual violence should be counselled and supported. Since the society sees sexual violence as normal, the Church should organize programs to sensitize communities on the harms of sexual predation against women. Women should be encouraged to speak out and form support groups in order to fight for the eradication of any sexual violence against them.

In a world where male power dominates in most cultures, predation against women is increasing. Sexual predation against women is one of the key evils triumphing in the world today. There are cases of rape, assault and harassment against women as a result of hegemonic patriarchal cultures. These cultures subjugate women and push them to the margin thereby making them more vulnerable than ever. This vulnerability presents women as preys to men and this leads to sexual predation of all kinds, causing diseases and affecting women negatively.

This paper focused on sexual predation/rape/assault on women, which continue to challenge theological bioethics and the Church in general. It also scrutinized the two primary cultures influencing androcentric mentality in Africa: The Biblical culture and the African traditional culture. It further exposed predation against women in Africa and Nigeria in particular and also highlighted the consequences of predation on women, which in most cases are disability, HIV/AIDS, and abortion/unwanted pregnancy. The Church is involved in fighting this menace via condemnation of the act and also preaching against it. This paper therefore recommends and challenge the Church to put up more practical efforts in order to quell and mitigate this reality. Finally, what would Christ do? How did Christ relate to women? In the New Testament, all were called to God's table. There was no segregation. Jesus did not disrespect any woman, though the culture of his time did. After the resurrection, Mary Magdalene was the first witness and was sent to inform the apostles. If Christ welcomed women, then our Church and world should do the same by mitigating all forms of discrimination, suppression, aggression, and oppression against women.

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