

# The Social Context of Reported Rape in Benin City, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the social context of rape in Benin City, Nigeria, through analysis of rape cases reported to a police clinic in the city. The results showed that female adolescents were more likely than older women to present to the clinic as rape victims. The most common type of reported rape was gang rape followed by domestic rape, while rape involving unknown assailants, was less common. The police clinic lacked counselling procedures to address the associated psychological effects of rape. We conclude that a multidisciplinary approach, including appropriate policy and legal frameworks, is needed to more comprehensively address the complex psycho-social issues associated with rape in Benin City. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 1998;2(2):37-43)

## RÉSUMÉ

Le contexte social du viol reporté dans la ville de Benin, Nigeria. Cette étude a consisté à observer le contexte social dans lequel se produisent les viols dans la ville de Bénin au Nigéria, à travers l'analyse des cas de viols reportés à la clinique policière de la ville. Les résultats de l'étude ont révélé que les adolescentes étaient celles qui tendaient le plus à se présenter à la clinique comme ayant été victimes d'un viol. Le type de viol le plus courant était le viol domestique, tandis que le viol classique, c'est-à-dire celui perpétré par un ou des assaillant(s) inconnu(s), était moins courant. La clinique policière ne prévoyait pas de méthodes d'assistance propres à la prise en charge des effets psychologiques liés au viol. Nous concluons donc qu'une approche pluridisciplinaire incluant la mise en place d'une politique et d'un cadre légal adéquats, est nécessaire pour une prise en charge plus complète des problèmes psycho-sociaux associés au viol dans la ville de Benin. (*Rev Afr Santé Reprod* 1998;2(2):37-43)

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KEY WORDS: Rape, adolescents, Nigeria, women, police

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and therefore less prepared to face the associated social ordeal. Second, older women may be less likely to enter into high risk situations such as food hawking, returning home late from outside activities such as school, trading, or participating in social parties.

Our findings reported substantial psychological trauma among women presenting with rape at the clinic. These were mainly illustrated through expressions of anger directed at the rapists. The women saw themselves as being objects through which the offenders exhibited their physical power and sexuality. In general, the women felt helpless, especially as they were acutely aware of the difficulties in obtaining redress for rape within the Nigerian legal system. These frustrations are indicative of a total lack of support for victims of rape that has been reported from several developing countries.<sup>19</sup> The difficulties in establishing and allocating punishments for cases of rape further confirms women's powerlessness in a male-dominated and patriarchal society. In most cases, the women are blamed while the male perpetrators go unpunished. As reproductive health advocates map out their strategies for enhancing women's reproductive rights and health in developing countries, appropriating the necessary legislations for rape and other cases of sexual abuse would be an important critical area that needs to be focussed upon.

The results of this study indicate that gang (group) rape was the most common type of rape reported in the clinic, followed by date rape and classical rape. These results are inconsistent with the results of similar studies in the literature.<sup>9-12</sup>

The results of this study may be indicative of the harsh economic conditions prevalent in Nigeria at the time of this study. During the period, the Nigerian government was embarking on a number of policies and programmes to curtail growing inflation and economic recession. One of such measures was the implementation of the structural adjustment programme that resulted in the retrenchment of workers, massive unemployment and the devaluation of the local currency. These conditions created economic, social and political difficulties, and may have influenced

the personality and behaviour of men. In traditional and contemporary Nigerian society, men are highly conscious and struggling to maintain their position as heads of households, and their superiority to women. Harsh economic and social conditions may explain the drive in men to seek and engage in various acts to confirm the social control they exercise over women.

Additionally, the increasing unemployment due to the structural adjustment programme and the attendant household poverty<sup>20</sup> have led to female adolescents selling or hawking commodities, in particular food and snacks, in an effort to alleviate poverty. These economic activities require that female adolescents work at odd hours of the day, returning home late. Therefore, female adolescents become vulnerable to men. This contest is consistent with our finding that the fathers or husbands of those presenting rape are of low socio-economic background.

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