

Prevalence of Sexual Assault in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Sexual assault (SA) is an umbrella terminology which encompasses a wide range of sexual offenses extending to actual or attempted unlawful sexual penetration also called rape. It is a common phenomenon which occurs worldwide.

Objectives: To estimate the prevalence of different types of sexual assault and to describe the methods of penetration used (e.g., incapacitation, physical force, verbal coercion).

Method: This study was carried out at the Department of Morbid Anatomy, Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki and it was a one year retrospective study in which cases of rape were reviewed. The work analyzed 31 cases of rape in Accident and Emergency Department of the Hospital over a one year period from January 2017 to December 2017.

Result: The mean age (in years) of all subjects in this study was 32.09±17.9 SD. The age range was 0–59 years. The groups of highest number of cases (12, 38.7%; 11, 35.5%) were at the age groups 10-19 years and 0-9 years, respectively. In addition, there was no case of rape involving any male victim in this study. Moreover, no case involving females aged 60 years and above was seen. Children were found to be sexually abused more than the adults. The differences between age distributions of cases according to sex in this study were statistically significant with the P-value of 0.001. Neighbors were discovered to be the highest perpetrators of sexual assault accounting for the highest number of cases 8 (25.8%). In most cases 20 (64.5%), the victims were raped by single assailant and the majority of them in this category were children.

Conclusion: Although the prevalence of sexual assault in this study appears to be low, it confirms the existence of the phenomenon in Abakaliki, Nigeria, and a major cause for concern is the fact that those affected were predominantly young children. To curb this heinous act, parents must be vigilant and closely monitor their children, while the government should enact stringent laws and be ready to wield the big stick in situations of need.

Keywords: prevalence, sexual assault, Abakaliki

1. Introduction

Sexual assault (SA) is an umbrella terminology which encompasses a wide range of sexual offenses extending to actual or attempted unlawful sexual penetration also called rape (Nig. Law, 1958). It is a common phenomenon that occurs worldwide. The prevalence rate of sexual violence in some countries is as high as one in five women and up to a third of the victims mostly young girls experienced forced sexual initiation (US National Violence Resource Centre). A range of acts are categorized as sexual assault and these include: coerced sex in marriage and dating relationships, rape by strangers, organized rape in war, sexual harassment (including demands of sex for jobs or school grades), and rape of children, trafficking of women and girls, female genital mutilation, and forced exposure to pornography (Okoli, 2013). Rape is a pandemic crime and it is characteristically underreported worldwide. Nigeria is one of the countries notorious with high prevalence of rape and this has been variously attributed to the enduring culture of male dominance, social and economic disempowerment of females and poor

or non-prosecution of sex offenders (Okoli, 2013). In September 2011, a video showing some South-eastern Nigerian woman being gang raped appeared on the internet; igniting a sensational global outrage with the attention of the Nigerian authorities to the alarming status of rape in the country drawn (Okoli, 2013). Sexual assaults do not only represent physical contacts. It is interesting to know that individual can be verbally or visually abused sexually. In addition, any act that forces a person to join in unwanted sexual contact or attention is termed sexual abuse (US National Violence Resource Centre). Female offenders of sexual assaults have been identified by some researchers and the motivational drive for the female offender is similar to that of their male counterparts which include: power and control (Holmes & Slap, 1998). However, most members of our society are yet to come to terms with the possibility of the occurrence of male sexual assault. This fact is worsened by the slim possibility of the male victims willingly disclosing sexual abuse. Consequently, this, no doubt has made the subject and research into male sexual assault a difficult one (Bell, 1999).

This index study was undertaken to estimate the prevalence and the characteristics of sexual assault in Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki, Ebonyi State with the aim getting an estimate of the prevalence of types of sexual assault incidents involving (a) sexualized touching, (b) attempted penetrative oral, and orvaginal sex, and (c) completed penetrative sex. We also aim to describe the methods of penetration (e.g, incapacitation, physical force, verbal coercion) used.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out at the Department of Morbid Anatomy, Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki. Cases were referred from Departments of Accident and Emergency and Family Medicine, Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki to Morbid Anatomy. It is a one year retrospective study in which cases of rape were reviewed. This work analyzed 31 cases in Accident and Emergency (A & E) department of the hospital over a period of one year from January 2017 to December 2017. An approval had been obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki to meet the ethical guidelines to enable the study to be carried out. Results of these cases were collated and subsequently analyzed. Medical records register in Accident and Emergency department of the hospital were retrieved and reviewed by the investigators, who are consultant pathologists to confirm the various diagnoses in respect to the cases. Included in the study are: Established cases of physical assault and rape cases whose diagnosis had been verified by at least two physicians and cases with complete patient data.

Excluded in the study are: Cases with incomplete patient data and all cases that could not be gotten from the departmental archive or store of A & E.

Data collected was analyzed using International Business Machine, Statistical Package for Social Science (IBM SPSS) window 23. Relevant means and frequencies were presented in tables, figures, and summary indices. Inferential statistics (bivariate analysis) was done using chi square test. P value <0.05 was considered significant.

3. Results

There were 31 cases of sexual assault over the 1-year period from January 2017 to December 2017.

Table 1. Rape cases according to age groups

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 9yrs	11	35.5%
10 -19yrs	12	38.7%
20 - 29yrs	1	3.2%
30 - 39yrs	4	12.9%
40 - 49yrs	2	6.5%
50 - 59yrs	1	3.2%
Total	31	100.0%

Table 2. Pattern of sexual assault and its perpetrators in Abakaliki, South eastern Nigeria

Identity of assailant	Frequency (n = 31)	Percentage (%)
Neighbours	8	25.8
Armed robbers	3	9.7
Strangers	3	9.7
Commercial motorcyclist	3	9.7
Customer	2	6.5
Friend	2	6.5
Acquaintance	6	19.4
Commercial bus driver	2	6.5
Policemen	2	6.5
Others	0	0.0
Number of assailants		
One	20	64.5
Two	6	19.4
Three	3	9.7
Four	2	6.5
Venue of Assault		
Assailant's house	15	48.4
Victim's home	6	19.4
Bush	3	9.7
Uncompleted building	4	12.9
Vehicle	0	0
Farm	3	9.7
Others	0	0.0
Type of assault		
Forced peno-vaginal intercourse	21	67.7
Insertion of finger into the vagina	4	12.9
Insertion of a twig into the vagina	2	6.5
Forced peno-anal intercourse	3	9.7
Forced Peno-oral Intercourse	1	3.2
Means of subjugation		
Verbal threats	18	58.1
Actual use of force	8	25.8
Enticement/Inducement	5	16.1

Table 3. Mode of presentation and type of injury sustained

Variables	Frequency (n=31)	Percentage (%)
Mode of Presentation		
Vaginal bleeding	12	38.7
Secretions on the vulva	6	19.4
Perineal swelling	2	6.5
Vaginal discharge	2	6.5
Brought in dead	0	0.0
Acute urinary retention	2	6.5
Neck laceration	4	12.9
Facial swelling	3	9.7
Type of injury sustained		
Vaginal laceration	12	38.7
Perianal bruises/ lacerations	7	22.6
Vaginal bruises	4	12.9
No demonstrable injury	2	6.5
Neck laceration	6	19.4

A total of 31 cases were analysed in the study period. The mean age in years of all subjects in this study was 32.09 ± 17.9 SD. The age range was 0-59 years. However, the groups of highest number of cases (12, 38.7%; 11, 35.5%) were at the age groups 10-19 years and 0-9 years, respectively. No male case reported in this study. The distribution of cases in these age groups and others are illustrated in table 1. This study shows that the females aged 60 years and above were unaffected. It was also noted that children were sexually abused more than the adults. The differences between age distributions of cases according to sex in this study are statistically significant with the P-value of 0.001. The pattern of sexual assault and its perpetrators in Abakaliki was illustrated in table 2. In table 2, neighbours were identified to be the highest perpetrators of sexual assault, and they accounted for 8 (25.8%) cases. The least in this category was sexual assault by the law enforcement agents (Policemen) which involved only 2 (6.5%) cases. Rape involving one assailant was identified as the commonest 20 (64.5%) probably because the majority of the victim were children. In addition, 15 cases (48.4%) of rape were carried out in the assailant's house while only 6 cases (19.4%) were recorded to have occurred in the victim's house. The study showed that forced peno-vaginal intercourse accounted for the highest number of cases 21 (67.7%) and the least is forced-peno-oral intercourse which accounted for only 1 case (3.2%). In the events of subjugation, verbal threats had the highest number of cases 18 (58.1%), followed by actual use of force which accounted for 8 cases (25.8%). Enticement/inducement had the least number of cases 5 (16.1%). Mode of presentation and type of injury sustained was illustrated in table 3. Vaginal bleeding was reported more and had the highest number of frequency, involving 12 (38.7%) cases, followed by cases of patients presenting with whitish secretions on the vulva which was 6 cases (19.4). There was no case of dead victims in this study. Moreover, on the type of injury sustained, vaginal laceration was 12 cases (38.7%), followed by perianal bruises/lacerations which had 7 cases (22.6%). In 2 cases (6.5%), patient did not sustain any injury and as such were recorded as no demonstrable injury.

4. Discussion

Sexual assault (SA) is an umbrella terminology which encompasses a wide range of sexual offenses extending to actual or attempted unlawful sexual penetration and it is also referred to as rape (Nig.Law,1958). The findings concerning SA, obtained from this index study, is comparable to the results obtained by other researchers in some previous studies performed in Nigeria (Nig. Law, 1958; US National Violence Resource Centre; Okoli, 2013). No reported case of male sexual assault survivor was documented in this study. This is in conformity with the findings in some other studies done in Nigeria and elsewhere (Ekabua et al., 2006; Adeleke et al., 2012; Chinawa et al., 2013). However, this could also be attributed to the fact that male sexual assault survivors are less likely to report the incident (Chinawa et al., 2013; Stewart & Frussel, 2000; Ashimi, Amole, & Ugwa, 2015). In a research conducted in Suleja, Nigeria, (Mairo et al., 2016) they documented two males (7%) among 29 survivors of child-sexual assault, thus demonstrating the existence of male sexual assault in the country. One reason being adduced as probably being responsible for high vulnerability of children to sexual assault is the evolving trend in our homes due to the need for both parents to be engaged in one form of business or another as a result of ailing economy thereby breeding under parenting with attendant depressed supervision of children. Although the

prevalence of sexual assault was relatively low (0.81%) in this study, it confirms the existence of the immoral act (rape) in Abakaliki, South-eastern part of Nigeria. This is similar to the findings documented in other studies done in the region (Chinawa et al., 2013; Ikechebelu et al., 2018). These figures may probably represent the tip of the iceberg with respect to its burden in the study area, more especially, if the low prevalence of sexual assault reported in health facilities based studies (Akinlusi et al., 2014; Audu, Geidam, & Jarma, 2009) is juxtaposed with the very high prevalence reported in community based studies (Ikechebelu et al., 2008; Audu et al., 2009; Kunnuji & Esiet, 2015), across Nigeria. It is important to note that the prevalence of sexual assault recorded in this study is much higher than that obtained in a study in Anambra State which is found in the same South-eastern Nigeria. Anambra State had a reported a prevalence of 0.42 (Ikechebelu et al., 2008). Interestingly, other researchers from Abakaliki in Ebonyi State (South-east, Nigeria) and Zaria in Kaduna State (North-west, Nigeria); were noted to have recorded similar prevalence rates of 0.9% and 0.84% respectively (Chinawa et al., 2013; Mairo, 2016). Similarly, studies conducted in Lagos State and Ile-ifein Osun State both in (South-west, Nigeria) reported prevalence of 0.76% and 0.69% (Badejok, 2014) respectively. These findings suggest that sexual assault is indeed a serious problem in Abakaliki just like other parts of Nigeria. About two-thirds of the victims in this study involved young children aged between ten and twenty years. This finding is similar to that obtained by Bhattacharyya et al. (2012) and Lakew (Lakew, 2001) in which teenagers accounted for majority of cases. The assault took place in either the victims or assailants homes in approximately a half of cases (48.4%), and in about a quarter or one-fifth of cases, the assailants were either Neighbors (25.8%) or close acquaintances (19.4%) respectively. These are in agreement with the findings obtained in a study carried out in Osogbo, south-west Nigeria (Adeleke, 2012); where 38.2% and 20.6% of the assailant cases were either acquaintances or family members respectively. Vaginal bleeding due to laceration was recorded as the commonest mode of presentation seen in this index study (38.7%). Comparatively, in similar study carried out in Sokoto State (South-west, Nigeria) vaginal bleeding due to laceration was also recorded as the commonest presentation, constituting (24%) of the cases. The same Sokoto study also documented that the majority of the victims (64.5%) were assaulted by only one assailant, who were regarded as acquaintances by the victims (Badejok, 2014). Surprisingly, none of the cases of sexual assault was noted to have been reported to law enforcement agents. This probably may not be unconnected with the fact that most of the victims were minors and their parents/ guardians could have taken the decisions of not reporting to the police for fear of stigmatization, rejection by the society and safety concerns of their wards. However, in other regions of Nigeria where similar studies were conducted; recorded cases of arrests by law enforcement agents in juvenile assaults were reported (Badejok, 2014).

5. Conclusion

This study confirms the existence of the phenomenon in Abakaliki, Nigeria, and a major cause for concern is the fact that those affected were predominantly young children. To curb this obnoxious behavior, it is imperative that every parent should step-up vigilance in the monitoring of their children. Enactment of stringent laws by the State Government to punish perpetrators of this dastardly act is apt.

Major discovery in this study are:

- i. That sexual assault is a possible occurrence in our society just as it happens across the world;
- ii. That the majority of victims are young people aged below 20 years and that the assaults are mostly perpetrated by persons known to them;
- iii. That the majority of cases are grossly under reported due to fear of stigmatization, rejection by the society and safety concerns.

What are the presumed benefits of this study?

- i. That sexual assault exists in Abakaliki, South-east Nigeria, with similar prevalence in other States and regions in Nigeria.
- ii. Calls for improved parental guidance and training of their children.
- iii. Need for increase in awareness.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest. There was no grant or funding for the study.

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