

Full Length Research Paper

When does sex become violent? Conceptualizing sexual violence in the context of rural young Igala women in Nigeria

Femi, Rufus Tinuola^{1*} and James Adeola Olaogun²

¹Department of Sociology, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria.

²University of Ado Ekiti, Nigeria.

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This study examines age at first sexual experience, motivation for sex and attempt conceptualization of sexual violence in the understanding of young rural women in Nigeria. The study was carried out among the Igalas, the ninth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. The study adopted a quantitative research method to obtain data. A sample of 1200 women between age 15 – 30 years were randomly selected from Olamoboro, Dekina, Idah, Ankpá, Ofu and Igalamela council areas, identified on the basis of systematic random sampling. 200 respondents were selected from two rural communities in each of the local council to respond to a structured questionnaire which contains both open and closed ended questions on issues bordering on sexual violence. Data were collected, collated and analysed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences in simple percentage and hypotheses tested with the use of chi square technique. Findings showed that the mean age at first sex has reduced to 15.5 years, young rural women enter into sexual activities for economic and financial benefits and sexual violence was generally conceived as sexual intercourse that is not in the interest of at least one of the parties and in action detrimental to the socio-psychological and physical well being of any of the actors among others.

Key words: Violence, sexuality, rape, rural, psychological, physiological.

INTRODUCTION

The Beijing Platform for Action, Paragraph 113 of the fourth world conference on women (1995) clearly identified forms of violence against women to include physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and domestic violence. A further breakdown of the concept delves into physical, psychological and sexual violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, trafficking in women and forced prostitution (Ipas, 2007). The latter positions some sexual acts such as rape, sexual harassment and sexual intimidation, as bad because of because of their perceived association with violence, fur-

ther arguing that while men perpetrate these acts, women are at the receiving end.

The flip side of the women as victims of bad sex' discourse view 'men as sexual predators' one. Even when both sexes have right to sex, an attempt to defend one's sexual rights could result into tampering with the other person's sexual right. The formulation of sexual rights that applies to women only and framed within the reference of violence is problematic and those which make men invisible is simplistic. Sexual violence is a pervasive global health and human rights problem. In some countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa, approximately one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner. Long-term consequences of sexual violence on women vary from physical, social and psychological effects. There is the likelihood of increased infection with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, unintended pregnancy and subsequent unsafe abortion, and injuries including trauma to the reproductive tract. Women who suffer from sexual violence often expe-

*Corresponding author. E-mail: adufem2000@yahoo.com.

rience stigma and face rejection by partners, hus-bands, families, and communities.

The World Health Organisation (1999) identified a common societal reaction towards female victims of violence as shifting blame on them for the abuse they suffer. Could the society see women as contributing to their being sexually abused? Even when they contribute partly to the scenarios of being sexually abuse, should that give men audacity to be sexually violent on women? In Africa, sexuality is regulated through the marriage institution, marriage remains the most widely recognized social framework for reproduction and sexual relationship (Tiemoko, 2007) and various studies have found sexual activity for the woman as an obligation than a choice. Africa sexual system does not recognize any right for women in sexuality, in fact, Christian Holy Book, the Bible, clearly states that a man should marry a woman to avoid fornication. The supporting view is that sexual organs of men are to be satisfied within marriage institution regardless of whether a woman is interested or not. If abuse is tampering on another person's sexual right, the context at which the right is defined must be made clear. Using language that is reflective of international rights discourse, sexual rights include the right of all to make choices based on consent on who their partners are, that is, the right to choose a sexual partner, what kind of sex they want to engage in that is, whether oral, anal or vagina sex, and every other issue regarding their sexuality. There is nothing more personal than the body and nothing more political either. The political body is not only tied to the individual being but is also integrally linked to local, social and public space. It is on the body that state, community, family, religion and fundamentalist forces act (Flavian, 2006). The quest for pleasure is an expression based on an individual and relationship auto-nomy, which legitimizes self perception as persons with a right to pleasure both in terms of erotic, amorous sexual play. Sexual pleasures are supposed to be derived with-in 'rightful' sphere. The society defines what is right and what is not right, the notion that makes sexual right universal because they apply to all human beings from the moment of their birth (Nelson, 2006).

Basile and Saltzman (2002) identified three forms of sexual violence to include a complete sex act, viewed as a contact between the penis and vulva or the penis and the anus involving penetration, contact between mouth and penis, vulva or anus or penetration of genital opening of another person by hand finger, or other object. Secondly, abusive sexual contact described as intentional touching, either directly or through the touching of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh or buttocks of any person. The non contact sexual abuse does not involve physical contact such as voyenurism, intentional exposure of an individual to exhibitionism, pornography, verbal or behavioral sexual harassment.

Basile et al. (2006) reported that approximately 1.5 million women are raped and/ or physically assaulted by an intimate partner each year in most of developing countries of the

world. Sexual violence can be harmful and lasting consequences for victims, families and communities. A study by Wingood et al. (2000) found that women who experience both sexual and physical abuse are significantly more likely to have contracted sexually transmitted infections and that more than 32,000 pregnancies result from rape every year. A more comprehensive study by Jewkes et al. (2002) identified long term consequences of sexual abuse to include chronic pelvic pain, premenstrual syndrome, pregnancy complications, back pain, facial pain and disability that prevents work. Corroborating the findings above, Ackard (2002), Faravelli et al. (2004), Felitti et al. (1998), Knakow et al. (2002), Ystgaard et al. (2004) studies on psychological consequences of sexual violence and found that shock, denial, fear, confusion, anxiety, withdrawal, guilt and distrust of others are significant consequences of sexual violence. Clements et al. (2004) and Golding et al. (2002) found lower likelihood of marriage, less emotional support from friends and families and strained relationship with the victims' family as social impacts of sexual abuse.

The study was carried out among the Igalas in North Central Nigeria. Igala, the study area, the largest ethnic group in Kogi State and the ninth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, occupies north central part of Nigeria with a numerical strength of about 1 million people (NPC, 2006). The notable settlements in Igala land are Idah, Ankpa, Anyigba (the State University town), Dekina and Itope spread over 24 local council areas in Kogi State. The language of communication is Igala and older generations among the Igalas are noticeable with three stripes tribal marks on the cheek. The paramount ruler is the Attah of Igala resident in Idah.

With all the guarantee of sexual rights, and the desire to derive sexual pleasure when does sex become violent to either of the partner? This is because sex which begins with the conscious agreement of the duo may end up in violence and the perception of sexual violence varies by individual, community, society and legal perspectives. Researches on what people perceived as sexual violence may cover some gaps in theoretical conceptualization of the concept most especially when such researches are conducted among young women who are the most affected segment of the population that is affected by sexual violence. Considering the various views above, it is imperative to examine, from people's perspective of what constitutes violence by a sexual partner. The main thrust of this research is to attempt conceptualization of sexual violence in the context of young women aged 15 – 30 years in Nigeria

OBJECTIVES

- i.) To examine age at first sexual experience. found at 15.5 years among the respondents.
- ii.) To examine motivation for sex in the context of rural young women.

iii) To conceptualise sexual violence in the understanding of rural young women.

Methods of data collection

A sample of 1200 women between ages 15 – 30 years were simple randomly selected from six council areas, identified on the basis of systematic random sampling. 200 respondents were selected from each of the local council to respond to a structured questionnaire which contains both open and closed ended questions on issues bordering on sexual violence. Section one contains demographic characteristics. Data were collected, collated and analysed with the use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences in simple percentage and hypotheses tested with the use of chi square technique.

Findings

Sample characteristics

About two – fifth of the total sample were between 15 – 20 years of age, 36.4% were between 21 - 23 years while the remaining 19% were between 24 - 30 years. The mean age of the respondents was 22.5 years. The three major religions were indicated by the respondents; Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion. Forty – eight percent were Christians, 50% were Moslems while just 2% were adherents of traditional religion. There is predominance of polygamous marriages in the study locations, about 68% of the total samples were born into polygamous family system while 32% were product of monogamous family arrangement. The evidence of dwindling pattern of polygamous family arrangement was found in the immediate family arrangement of those respondents who were married. Out of the one – quarter who were married among the respondents, just 8% were involved in polygamous family while the remaining three - quarter were engaged in monogamous family. Seventy - four percent have engaged in heterosexual genital activity while 23% had not engaged in sexual relationship, the remaining 3% felt too shy to indicate whether they had engaged in sexual intercourse or not. Of the sample, who indicated having sex or not, three-quarter had at least one boy friend while one – quarter did not have any boy friend. A fallout of the data is that not all those who had boy friend had engaged in sexual relationship. Factors indicated to have contributed to this trend are age, length of the relationship and religious inclination of the partners. Data on age at first sexual intercourse indicated that about 75% had sex before 20 years of age, while 25% had their first sexual intercourse at age between 20 – 22 years. The mean age at first sexual experience was

Conceptualizing sexual violence

In Table 1, little above half of the sample (54.5%) strongly

agreed that sexual violence includes the act of sex when one of the partner was not interested. The inability of the male sexual partner not to reason along with them when they are not interested in sex is an act that impinges on their sexual rights. About 7% disagreed with the view above. The length of expression of sexual act was believed to be directly related with sexual violence, 66% indicated that an act of sexual violence is committed when a sexual partner has sex with a girl longer than she is interested. The length of sex is influenced by the extent of sexual arousal, orgasm and varies from one individual to the other. Consequently, the ideal length of sexual relationship could not be ascertained by the respondents. The remaining 34% could not link the length of sexual relationship as sexual violence. These respondents indicated that since the two parties consented to having sexual relationship, the length of such relationship should not be described as sexual violence. Few of them asked, “how do you know when your partner is no longer interested?”

Seventy percent agreed that sex without actually gaining conscience of the partner is partly sexual abuse and violence. Ninety – five percent described rape as sexual violence simply because the rapists forced their way in to the lives of their victims in uncomfortable circumstances that may not be convenient for the lady. They described the male rapists as circumstantially inferior to their female victims. About 68% agreed that the rapists are likely to engage sex in a manner that the sexual partners do not like, most especially, the type and nature of penetration. Thirty – two percent described rapists as not different from any other member of the society and that they may not in all cases handle their victims in a way they do not like. Places where sexual intercourse takes place are identified as one of the determinants of sexual violence. 58% agreed that sex which takes place where one of the actors do not like result in sexual violence. Further, they described sexual intercourse which takes place in sitting rooms (45%), behind the walls (55%), bathrooms and toilet rooms (61%), inside cars and buses (76%), on bare floor (91%) as violent in nature.

There are different standards as to the normal place where sexual activities should take place according to the respondents. While majority of the respondents indicated a normal standard room, they further stressed that sex could take place at any where depending on the agreement of the parties involved. Eighty-seven percent agreed that the practice of oral sex has nothing to do with sexual violence, describing it as a method of achieving orgasm and sexual pleasure. Sixty – seven percent of the women between 15 – 25 years preferred oral sex than those between 26 – 30 years. Vagina sex was appreciated by almost all the participants in the study.

Sex when one of the partners is drunk is violent according to 60% of the respondents. They indicated a correlation between drunkenness, unconsciousness, and sexual violence. A man who is unconscious resulting from drunkenness

Table 1. Conceptualizing of sexual violence in the understanding of rural young women.

When does sex become violent?	SD%	D%	A%	SD%
Making love with me when I am not interested	6.6	17.4	17.4	54.5
Making love with me longer than I am interested	5.0	24.8	24.0	42.1
Making love with me without my consent	9.1	19.8	26.4	43.0
Making love with me in a manner I don't like	5.0	26.4	26.4	42.1
Making love with me in a wrong place	14.9	24.0	25.6	33.9
Making oral sex with me	9.1	13.2	39.7	25.6
Making vagina sex with me	35.5	14.0	19.0	19.0
Making anal sex with me	14.0	13.2	39.7	20.7
Making love with me when I am drunk	28.1	24.8	9.9	37.2
Making love with me when I am unconscious	24.9	28.9	9.9	36.4
Sex with someone less than 15 years old	34.8	38.8	3.3	23.1
Making casual sex	28.9	39.7	10.7	19.0
Sex in parties	37.2	22.3	19.0	19.8
Making love for economic/financial gains	40.5	28.1	20.7	10.7
When a girl is raped	6.6	5.0	11.6	76.9
Sex with rich men	41.3	28.1	19.0	11.6
Making love in the wrong time	8.3	28.1	38.8	24.8
Making love during menstruation	17.4	33.1	27.3	22.3
Making love with someone I don't like	27.3	45.5	13.2	14.0
When I am rough handled during sex	0.8	25.6	27.3	46.3
Wrong position during sex	23.1	9.9	20.7	46.3

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2008.

from drunkenness could be violent in the way he handles the female partner during sex. Also, when a girl is hypnotized, 45% strongly agreed that there is every tendency for violence during such sexual intercourse. Over 70% disagreed that sex with girls less than 15 years old is violent. These respondents were of the opinion that age should not be a criterion for expressing one's sexual orgy and actual sexual intercourse. In as much that the sexual right of the individual is guaranteed, the respondents stressed that a girl less than 15 years could engage in sex.

Having sex in the wrong time was indicated by respondents as having some elements of sexual violence. About 67% agreed that sexual intercourse with them at the wrong time could lead to hasty sex and may not be comfortable for the partner, but 33% disagreed. A proportion of the sample (49.6%) indicated that sexual intercourse during menstrual period as an act of sexual violence. Sex during this period is unhealthy and could facilitate the transmission of any sexually transmitted infection including HIV/AIDS. Few of the sample indicated that it could result into excessive abnormal flow of discharge that may have a consequential effect on the sexual and reproductive health life of the victims. About

half (50.4%) could not link sex during menstrual flow with sexual violence if the two parties consented.

Wrong positioning during sex is viewed as sexual violence by 56.2% of the total respondents. The positioning of the male sexual partner is one of the major determinants of sexual pleasure. Situations where sexual partners are wrongly positioned at the expense of another could be described as sexual violence. However, respondents agreed that whether a position during sex is right or wrong is subjective, because a position that is wrong for an individual may be wrong for the other person, but that when an individual describes a sexual position as wrong, it is sexual violence.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis one

H₀: $r =$ That age is not indirectly related with the first sexual intercourse.

H₁: $r =$ That age is directly related with the first sexual intercourse.

The hypothesis above was formulated to examine the

relationship between age of the respondents and whether the experience of first sexual intercourse. It is meant to measure whether age is determinant of involvement in sexual intercourse or not. Chi square technique was used to test the hypothesis. Chi square result shows that,

$\chi^2_c = 107.17$, $\chi^2_t = 67.8$, $df (v) = 8$ tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Since $\chi^2_c > \chi^2_t$, the null hypothesis is accepted and confirmed. Age is, therefore, significantly related with whether an individual has ever had sex or not. The data show that the lower the age, the higher the tendency to engage in sexual intercourse.

This reflected on the result on age at first sexual intercourse which data found at 15.5 years. Those who experience their first sexual intercourse at age above 20 years constitute less than 10% of the sample. Age at first sexual experience continues to dwindle according to researches. Action Health Incorporated (1998) found the mean age at first sexual intercourse at 18 years in parts of Lagos. Tinuola (2004, 2005) found the mean age at first sexual intercourse at 17 and 16 years in south west Nigeria, respectively. The current data confirm further reduction in the mean age at first sexual experience by one year.

Hypothesis two

$H_0: r =$ That respondents' perception of sexual violence will not influence the perception of being rough handled during sex.

$H_1: r =$ That respondents' perception of sexual violence will influence the perception of being rough handled during sex.

The hypothesis above was framed to examine relationship between sexual violence and the tendency to be rough handled during sex. The results of the Chi square show that $\chi^2_c = 42.9$, at 0.05 level of significance, $df (v) = 9$, $\chi^2_t = 34.1$. This shows that $\chi^2_c > \chi^2_t$. This implies that the perception of sexual harassment as sexual violence does not influence the probability of being rough handled during sex. Data indicate that there is no significant relationship between being rough handled during sex and sexual violence. A proportion argued that rough handling during sex may not necessarily result in sexual violence.

Hypothesis three

$H_0: r =$ That sex in night parties is indirectly proportional to being drunk during sex.

$H_1: r =$ That sex in night parties is directly proportional to being drunk during sex.

The hypothesis above intends to examine the relationship

between sexual intercourse that takes place in night parties and the probability that at least one of the sexual partners will be drunk of alcohol during sex. It provides an explanation on whether parties environment characterized by drinking and wining in alcohol could witness a consequential sex. The results of the Chi square show that $\chi^2_c = 46.26$, at 0.05 level of significance, $df (v) = 12$, $\chi^2_t = 56.5$. This shows that $\chi^2_c < \chi^2_t$, implying that the alternate hypothesis is accepted and confirmed. Sex in night parties is directly proportional to being drunk during sex. The data confirm that most sexual activities which take place in parties have a higher propensity that at least one of the sexual actors being drunk alcohol.

Hypothesis four

$H_0: r =$ That the desire for economic gains is not a motivation for sex with rich men.

$H_1: r =$ That the desire for economic gains is a motivation for sex with rich men.

The hypothesis above examines, all other factors held constant, whether the desire for economic gains is directly related with the desire to have sex with rich men or not. It provides answers to the questions "do young women have sex with rich men for economic gains?" The results of the Chi square show that $\chi^2_c = 145.49$, at 0.05 level of significance, $df (v) = 9$, $\chi^2_t = 153.9$. This shows that $\chi^2_c < \chi^2_t$, implying that the alternate hypothesis is accepted and confirmed. The desire for economic gains is a motivation for sexual relationship with rich men in the study locations. This study validates the earlier findings of Tinuola and Fasoranti (2004) that younger women engage in sexual relationship with rich men in exchange of economic gains in some parts of northern Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study found the mean at first sexual experience at 15.5 years and that most young women engage in sex with rich men for economic and financial inducements. Also, In the light of this, respondents view sexual violence in the context of sex when one of the parties is not interested, longer than necessary, in a manner that the other person does not like, in a wrong place, when drunk of alcohol, unconscious, in wrong time, during menstruation, rough handlings during sex, wrong positioning during sex, and rape. The concepts above can assist in defining and conceptualizing sexual violence among young women in North central Nigeria and in similar settings. From the concepts above, a harmonized definition of sexual violence could be derived. Sexual violence refers to sexual advances / intercourse that are not in the interest of at least one of the parties and in action detrimental to the socio-psychological well being of any of the actors.

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