Benin City, Nijerya’da Cinsel Saldırılar

[Sexual Assaults in Benin City, Nigeria]

ÖZET
AMAÇ: Cinsel saldırı toplumdan topluma değişir. Nijerya’da kanunlar tarafından tanımlanan önemli cinsel saldırılar genelde eksik bildirilirse de; tecavüz, lekeleme (16 yaş altı kız çocuğulu ile gayrımesru ilişki) ve doğal olmayan yollardan cinsel işkildir. Bu çalışma Ortabatı Nijerya’daki tarih, üç farklı etnik grubun yaşadığı Benin şehrinde cinsel saldırıları öngörüntüsünü belgelyeleyi hedeflemiştir.

YÖNTEM: Bir yıl boyunca, Polis Tıbbi Merkezine yönlendirilen tüm cinsel saldırı vakaları tam olarak muayene edildi, araştırılı ve tescilli edildi. İlgili veriler daha sonra ayrıldı, analiz edildi ve sonuçlar önceliği çalışma ve diğer çalışmaarla karşılaştırıldı.

BULGULAR: Çalışma süresince toplam 1028 cinsel saldırı vakası bildirildi. Kurbanların yanında fazla %56,6’cı çocuktu. Cinsel saldırıların %88’inde saldırıların kurbanların tannımı yoctu, ancak kurbanların sadecesi %7,2’si mahkemeğe gitti. Vakaların %1,4’sü kurbanı tehdit etmek için silah kullanmıştı. Zamanı bilinen oğulları yüzde kırık aksam 8 ile gece yarısı arasında gerçekleşti.


SUMMARY
AIM: Sexual offences differ from society to society. In Nigeria, the major sexual offences defined by law are rape, defilement and unnatural offences, however these are often underreported. This study aims to document the pattern of sexual assaults in Benin City, a historical town in Midwestern Nigeria with a unique population of people from the three major ethnic groups in the country.

METHODS: Over a one year period, all cases of sexual assault referred to the Police Medical Centre, Benin City were fully examined, investigated and treated. Relevant data were then extracted and analyzed and the result compared with a previous study and others.

RESULTS: In the period under study, a total of 85 cases of sexual assault were reported out of a total of 1028 assault cases. More than half of the victims (56.6%) were children. In over 88% of cases of sexual assault the assailants were known to the victims and only 7.2% of victims went to court. In 14.1%, weapons were used to threaten the victims. Forty percent of the cases in which the time of occurrence was known occurred between 8p.m and 12 midnight. Reporting of such cases is late in over 47% of cases.

CONCLUSIONS: The pattern of sexual assault in Nigeria has remained virtually unchanged. We recommend sex education in secondary schools with instructions on precautions against sexual assault as well as strengthening our judicial services to handle such cases effectively.

INTRODUCTION
According to ancient writings of the bible, sex is a means by which man is to “go into the world and multiply” (1) and it is indulged in by both humans and other animals. What differentiates sex in humans from that in animals is that in humans, it is done with some degree of dignity, with consent of both parties when they are of age. This dignity also implies that humans cannot indulge in sexual activities with animals.

Aggrawal et al (2) believed that “the very mention of the word sex titillates, makes the blood run faster in the minds and hearts of all alike”. Occasionally, getting sex by legitimate consent becomes difficult and for different reasons, people may then indulge in “illegal sex”. These constitute sexual offences. These offences differ from society to society and what may constitute a sexual offence in one generation may be condoned in future generations. For example, homosexualism which used to be a grave sexual offence in western societies in the past is now a widely accepted practice, and proponents are even accorded with the same constitutional rights of traditional marriage. This means therefore that for every society what constitutes sexual offences may change with time.

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Key Words:
Sexual Assault, Assault, Offences, Rape

Gönderme Tarihi/Date of Submission: 20.04.2011, Kabul Tarihi/Date of Acceptance: 22.01.2013 DOI: 10.5455/pmb.1-1303366742
In Nigeria, a religious and traditional society, many sexual practices condoned in some of these western countries are still forbidden. The Criminal Code of 1990 devotes 2 Chapters—Chapters 21 and 30 to such sexual offences. The major sexual offences defined by this Act include rape, defilement and unnatural offences. Rape, derived from a Latin word “Rapere” (meaning to steal, seize or carry away) is defined by the Criminal Code Act (3) of Nigeria in Section 357 as “unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl, without her consent, or with consent if the consent is obtained by force, or by means of threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of havoc or by means of false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act or in the case of a married woman by impersonating her husband”. (3). The penalty for this offence is life imprisonment. Defilement means having unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl under the age of 16 years (Sections 218 and 221) (3). In some states in the northern part of Nigeria where the Sharia legal code is practiced, extramarital sex is an offence punishable by stoning to death, regardless of consent between the parties (4).

Sexual offences are underreported the world over for various reasons (5). In Nigeria, a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Women Aids Collective, estimates that only 2 of 40 cases of rape are reported, attributing this amongst other reasons, to the arduous legal requirements needed to prove the cases (6).

Benin City is a semi-urban, historical town in Midwestern Nigeria, with a vibrant nightlife. It has a relatively enlightened and unique populace constituting people from the three major ethnic groups in the country. Although there is a previous work on rapes in Benin City, this was done almost 20 years before the period of this study (7). Nigeria has undergone a lot of changes since then, including transition from military autocratic rule to democratic rule. The present study aims to document the changes in the pattern of rape cases and other sexual offences if any and to compare the findings to what obtains in other part of the world.

**PATIENTS AND METHOD**

All criminal cases reported to the Police in Benin City and requiring medical attention are sent to the government owned Central Hospital or the Police Medical Centre in Benin City. Such cases include sexual and non-sexual assaults, kidnapping, non-fatal road traffic accidents and other related cases. This is a descriptive study in which we retrospectively reviewed all sexual assaults in the Police Medical Centre, Benin City from 1\textsuperscript{st} January 2000 to 31\textsuperscript{st} December 2000. In all cases, the victims were examined fully including a vaginal examination and certain investigations performed. These tests routinely included a high vaginal swab for microscopy, culture and sensitivity, HIV screening (repeated after 3 months) and vaginal prostatic acid phosphatase (PAP). We recorded relevant data such as age, sex, occupation, time of occurrence, associated injuries, number of assailants, relationship to assailant and clinical findings. Data generated was analyzed using simple percentages. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of the Medical Center.

**RESULTS**

A total of 1028 assault cases were seen during the study period out of which 85 (8.3%) were cases of sexual assault. All the victims were females. These were either rape or defilement cases. No other sexual offence as defined by the Nigerian Criminal Code was seen. The ages of the victims of sexual assault ranged from 3 – 25 years with a mean age of 14.54 years ± 4.679 (S.D.). Table 1, shows the age distribution of the victims of sexual assault. The modal age group for sexual victims in this study was the age group 10 – 14 years accounting for 28.2% of the victims. The age group 20-24 years accounted for 13% of the cases. In all, children under the age of 15 years made up 56.5% of the cases, over half of the sexual assault victims.

While in 54 of the cases (63.5%), the act was perpetrated by one assailant, in 9 cases (10.8%) the act was perpetrated by 2 assailants and in 14 cases (16.2%) the act was perpetrated by between 3 and 7 assailants. Most victims of gang rape were students between the ages of 15 and 29 years (71.4%).

In 75 of all cases of sexual assaults (88.2%), at least one of the assailants was known by the victim. For those aged 0-9 years, the victims knew all the assailants and they were neighbors, family friends and other acquaintances.

Table 2 shows the occupational distribution of the victims. Ninety-three percent of victims of sexual assaults were students or pupils of primary, secondary and tertiary schools. Three victims (3.5%) were unemployed and these included 2 pre-school age
children, while another 3 (3.5%) victims were artisans.

In 12 of the cases (14.1%), weapons were used to threaten the victims. Such weapons included guns (50%), knives and machetes (41.7%), and other objects (25%). In few cases, a combination of weapons was used to threaten the victims.

Table 3 shows the time of occurrence of the sexual assaults. In 55 victims in which the time of the act was known, 40% occurred between the hours of 8 p.m and 12 midnight while 21.8% occurred between 12 noon and 4 p.m.

Associated injuries apart from the vulval injuries were found in 8 cases (9.4%). These injuries were in the face and neck in 5 cases (62.5%), on the trunk in one case (12.5%) and on the upper limbs in 5 cases (62.5%). In 3 cases (37.5%) there were multiple injuries to different regions.

Table 1. Age Distribution of Victims of Sexual Assault in Benin City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group (Years)</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Occupational Distribution of Victims of Sexual Assault in Benin City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artisan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>93.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

Sexual assault is the most rapidly growing violent crime in the United States of America (5). Getting a conviction in rape cases is notoriously difficult, if the case even goes to court (5,8). This may be one of the reasons rape cases are hardly reported. In our study, only 6 cases (7.1%) went to court. This is even lower than the finding in Auckland (9). This is not surprising as the cultural practice in most African settings extols the virtues of the virgin bride and a court case will publicize the victim’s violation and may in fact stigmatize her (10).

For legal purposes, it is important to see the victim as early as possible. In this study victims presented within 24 hours in 38 cases (43.5%), between 24-48 hours in 7 cases (8.2%) and after 48 hours in 40 cases (47.1%). Rainbow B et al (8) recommended seeing such patients within 36 hours for the assessment of vaginal PAP to be meaningful. Wiley et al (11) advocate a thorough examination within 24 hours for a meaningful legal outcome. In our study over 47% reported to the hospital after 48 hours, many reporting up to 14 days or more after the incident. Findings for legal purposes were scanty in such cases and this accounted partly for the few cases that went to court.
Sexual assaults are now known to occur at an alarming rate and to represent a significant public health problem (12). Amakiri (13) in rural Rivers State of Nigeria, found 29 cases of sexual assault, representing 7.7% of all forensic medical cases he had encountered within a period of 5 years. This is similar to our study, which is not population based, where sexual assaults constituted 8.3% of all assault cases. Considering reports that state that many of these cases go unreported (2), Benin City, and indeed Nigeria, may be contending with a serious public health problem. This is more so when one considers the sequelae of rape which includes sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancies, emotional and psychiatric complications amongst others (14).

It is noteworthy that majority (approximately 93%) of the victims in our study were students while the rest were either artisans or were unemployed, the latter comprising mainly preschool children. Although sexual assault victims can be employed in any discipline, all the employed victims in our study were artisans (workers skilled in specific handiworks or crafts) (15), including two tailors (seamstresses) who were self employed. Runge, in 2006, reported that majority of sexual assault victims in the United States were “at – will” employees who often lacked contractual terms and therefore may be fired for even disclosing that she is a victim of sexual assault (16).

In over 88% of cases, at least one of the assailants was known to the victim. These assailants were mainly neighbors, school mates and other acquaintances. De Jong et al (19) had found childhood sexual abuse victims to be assaulted by known assailants and with less violence.

In this study, in cases in which guns were used to threaten victims (7.1%), such victims were aged 20 years and above and the assailants were unknown. Substance use by assailants and victims has also been linked with sexual abuse. Although we did not perform assays for alcohol and drugs in victims, considering the very young age of some of the victims (as low as 3 years), there is little doubt that substance use may have played a role in some of these assaults.
CONCLUSION

Sexual assault is relatively common in this environment; the reporting rate is low and only a very small percentage goes to court. The victims know many of the assailants and in many cases, report the incident only after the likelihood of obtaining useful forensic evidence has long lapsed.

We recommend sex education in secondary schools with emphasis on taking precautions against sexual assault. The legal machinery for administration of justice in cases of sexual assault should be strengthened so that more of such cases go to court and assailants are convicted. Sexual assailants of children should be prosecuted by the state free of charge. Security should be tightened between the hours of 8 p.m and 12 midnight when many of such cases occur.

CONSENT

Written informed consent was obtained from each patient prior to commencement of the study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

All authors declare that there were no competing/conflicting interests.

REFERENCES
