

from **Sylvanus Viashima, Jalingo**

A few weeks ago, the media was inundated with the report of a son of an unnamed senator from Taraba State, who allegedly raped a seven-year-old girl to death.

Although the alleged claim could not be substantiated, yet record of rape cases in the state has been on a sharp increase in recent times with most of the victims, minors, according to investigation.

The police, according to reports, have been struggling with the headache of several reported rape cases as incidents of sexual violence continued to spark off huge concerns. It is estimated that 90 percent of these cases go unreported as a result of the stigma and the difficulty encountered in proving rape cases when they are eventually reported.

Fifteen-year-old Saadatu narrated her bitter experience. She confided in Daily Sun that as she was gang-raped over a month ago, she had not been able to resume her normal life

due to the psychological trauma haunting her since the incident. She was raped by a four-man gang who threatened her with knives and had taken turns on her in a nearby bush.

She confessed that she didn't report the case to the police for a couple of reasons, including the stigma. She, however, agreed to talk about the grim incident on the condition that her identity remained concealed.

Most of the victims of rape in the state, investigations have shown, are underage girl hawkers, who either strayed to remote, lightly populated areas or were lured by heartless pedophiles into their demonic clutches.

In a similar fate, 10-year-old Fatima was raped at Abuja Phase II area of Jalingo. She was a victim of a 38-year-old commercial tricyclist, Yusuf who diverted her into a nearby bush and defiled her on her way back from hawking sachet water.

Although, the culprit has since been arrested and is billed to face charges, the damage has been done. Today, Fatima's innocence is gone and unlike her mates that are basking in their

innocence, Fatima is burdened by the stigma of what happened while at the same time, striving so hard to move on with her life.

The stories of 16-year-old Beauty, who was raped by a five-man gang, 14-year-old Zainab, who fell victim to 25-year-old Tuktur, and 11-year-old Rahila who was defiled by 34-year-old Tijani are no different. They reek of the same stench of a degenerated system.

Police Public Relations Officer, David Misal, admitted that rape was unusual crime and defies a clear cut preventive strategy given that oftentimes, rape occurs at the residents or homes of the individual involved or in remote areas, where the police may not be immediately present.

He gave the example of Zainab who was raped by her assailant in her family house, adding that quite a good number of rape cases were the handiwork of "family friends," who defiled their victims with the active connivance of family members.

A social worker, Mrs. Claudia Yahaya, re-

marked that the society over stigmatizes victims of rape. She attributed it to the silence that overshadows the evil act and the refusal of victims to report to law enforcement agencies or come out in public to discuss their experiences for the benefit of others.

Yahaya, a teacher, reflected: "There is a reversal of disdain, which is directed at the victims rather than the culprits, making it difficult for victims to announce themselves while providing a safe haven for perpetrators."

A student at the Taraba State's College of Health Science, who opened up on conditions of anonymity, narrated her unfortunate experience and how it all changed her life. She was defiled by her stepfather at the age of 13. On account of that, she grew up with the feelings that "all men are beasts." Her impression about men was further worsened when at the age of 23, she was rough handed by two hoodlums, who had prearranged with a tricycle rider and she fell victim to their trap.

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