



Interrogating Institutional Measures against Rape in Lagos, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Rape has freely penetrated many societies across the world, including Nigeria. Despite being a severe crime, the scourge is fast becoming a grievous crime that harms the victims' physical and mental health in Lagos State, Nigeria. In spite of this precarious occurrence, there is dearth of knowledge on the institutional responses to rape in Lagos State.

Objectives: This study interrogated the effect and limitations of the Lagos State government's measures in curbing the menace of rape in Lagos State.

Method: This study employed a descriptive research design using quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Using purposive sampling technique, 105 respondents out of 14,920,049 estimated population of Lagos State (NPC, 2022), were administered copies of the questionnaire and few selected for interview (KII and IDI) sessions. Total of (99) copies of the questionnaire were retrieved back, while (12) oral interview sessions were successfully conducted. The validity of this study's instruments were ensured through expert review and pre-testing, while the data collected were presented using tables, frequencies, and percentages for quantitative findings, and thematic narratives for qualitative interview responses.

Findings: The result of the findings revealed that Lagos State measures against rape had positively enhanced the socio-security network for rape victims, promoted rape complaints' confidence and easy access to rape victims, but did not enhance prosecution of rapists, nor did they reduce rape occurrence in the State; and factors such as inadequate synergy between security agencies and Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (LSDVA), lack of forensic equipment to collect concrete evidence against rapists, and inadequate feedback from the prosecution process were the limitations of the government responses.

Conclusion: The study concluded that Lagos State measures against rape have positive effects on rape victims' well-being, but limited effects to deter rapists.

Unique Contribution:

Recommendations: The study recommended that institutional capacity should be strengthened towards the investigation, prosecution, and conviction of rapists to serve as a deterrent for other intended rapists.

Key Words: Rape, Lagos State, Sexual violence, Nigerian Police, Criminal code



INTRODUCTION

Rape has become a grievous crime that seriously harms the victims' physical and mental health. In many instances, victims are rendered incapable of seeking justice because of the fear of being attacked by their rapists, social shame, and lack of faith in the legal system (Stella &Ifeoma, 2023). In many countries of the world, rape incidences are prominent. In South Africa rape occurrence has risen by 132.4%, Botswana with 92.93%, Lesotho with 82.68%, and Sweden with 62.54% per 100,000 people between 2021 and 2023 (Iwalaiye, 2024). In India, there was a 20% rise in rape cases in the year 2021, with about 90 rape cases reported daily in 2022 (Patel, 2024). Interestingly, prosecutions are rare in these countries (Iwalaiye, 2024). While in India, 77% of women who have been assaulted have not reported it (Patel, 2024).

According to the United Nations, there were 11,200 reported rape cases in Nigeria in 2020 (Ukwubile & Tam, 2024). The Lagos police has substantiated that from April to June 2023, 111 occurrences of sexual assault were reported (Premium Times, 5th July, 2023). Women at Risk International Foundation, in collaboration with the United States Consulate General, Lagos State, affirmed that 33 percent of women and girls aged between 15 and 49 had experienced physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime (National Population Commission NPC, & ICF, 2019).

To address this challenge, Nigeria's government over the years has established varieties of measures, including signing and domestication of treaties, enactment of laws, and platforms to report, investigate, and prosecute suspected rapists, among many other measures. For instance, the Criminal Code Act, which applies in the Southern states, the Penal Code, which applies to the Northern states, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (VAPP), and other individual state laws on domestic violence and sexual offences, such as the Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State 2007 and the Ekiti State Gender Based Violence (Prohibition) Amendment Law, 2019 (GOV.UK, 2024), were enacted and are in operational across the country. In spite of this existing law and several other measures such as Family Support Units (FSU) and Gender Units of the State Criminal Investigation Division (State CID), both of the Nigeria Police, Lagos Command, adopted in Lagos State, this life-threatening incidence (rape) has risen steadily from 3,446 in 2019 to 6,389 in 2023, in addition to the unreported figure of the incidences in Lagos City (Ojuroungbe, 2024). While many of these reported cases are under-prosecuted due to lack of evidence against the suspected rapists or/and unwillingness of the victims to report the incidence, it is observable that most of the victims continue to suffer societal stereotypes, misogyny, physical and emotional pains for being a victim of rape. The menace has freely penetrated places of worship, offices, schools, and homes, the roadside, and commercial and public transports in the State.

Several existing studies (Iwalaiye, 2024; Patel, 2024; Ukwubile & Tam, 2024) regarding rape largely focused on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of sexual violence, with limited scholarly attention devoted to systematically interrogate the effectiveness of institutional measures such as legal frameworks, law enforcement mechanisms, and support systems in preventing rape and ensuring justice for victims. This academic gap therefore necessitates an empirical assessment of how these institutional responses function in practice and the extent to which they mitigate the problem of rape in Lagos State.



AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to interrogate the effect of government measures against rape in Lagos State. The objectives of the study were to:

- i. determine the effect of government measures against rape in Lagos State; and
- ii. identify the limitations of Lagos government measures against rape in Lagos State.

Conceptual Discourse

Rape

Rape has a history that almost equaled the history of man's creation. According to Michael and Toluwani (2024), rape is a type of sexual assault usually involving sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual penetration carried out against a person without that person's consent. It can involve forcing or manipulating someone to witness or participate in any sexual acts. In essence, rape is an act that may be carried out by physical force, coercion, abuse of authority, or against a person who is incapable of giving valid consent, such as one who is unconscious or incapacitated.

To Idoko et al. (2020), rape can be defined medically as unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will of a female or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent. The emphasis here is on medical implications, usually on the female gender that witnessed a rape. Beyond physical injury, rape can also result in some other injury (Ajah et al., 2022). These scholars' arguments showed that rape impedes people's freedom, and makes them lose their choice of sexual partner determination or decision.

Although across the globe, rape is fast becoming a crime against female folks, however, men are also victims of rape. This is the view of Obibuba (2020) that rape cuts across gender, race, tribe and class, and it is a universal phenomenon. The Nigeria constitution, Sections 357 and 358 of the Criminal Code Act applicable in the southern part of Nigeria, stated that:

Any person who has unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent, or with her consent, if the consent is obtained by force or using threats or intimidation of any kind, or by fear of harm, or using false and fraudulent representation as to the nature of the act, or in the case of a married woman, by personating her husband, is guilty of an offense which is called rape (Nigeria criminal code cited in Michael & Toluwani).

However, the Lagos State criminal code negates the above definition and provides a suitable and modern definition of rape that accommodate several other forms of rape; accordingly, the Criminal Law of Lagos State, chapter 25 section 261 stated that:

any person who penetrates sexually, the anus, vagina, mouth or any other opening in the body of another person with a part of his body or anything else, without the consent of the person is guilty of a felony and liable to imprisonment for life" (Lagos State criminal code, section 261 chapter 25).



In the context of this study, rape is considered as all forms of penetration into any part of the body carried out against a woman adult, or female child without her consent for the benefit of satisfying sexual desire.

Nigeria Government Measures Against Rape: Lagos State in Perspective

At the international level, several frameworks, norms, and standards addressing violence against women have been established, some of which are legally binding. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979; the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (VDPA) 1993; the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) 1993; the Beijing Platform for Action 1995; and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015 under Agenda 2030. These frameworks reflect global commitment to combating gender-based violence, particularly against women who are often vulnerable in society. According to UN-Women (2020), such frameworks establish internationally agreed norms and standards for the prevention of and response to violence against women, while encouraging governments and civil society to recognise it as a human rights violation requiring collective action. Although these treaties are not compulsory for every country to adopt, additional measures exist at regional and national levels.

At the regional level, African countries under the African Union have adopted several legal instruments to address sexual violence, including the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (Africa Union, 2021). Africa Union (2021) argues that the AU regards violence against women and girls as a major obstacle to women's enjoyment of fundamental rights such as life, dignity, peace, justice, and socio-economic and political development, thereby necessitating these legal frameworks to combat sexual violence, including rape. These international and regional efforts largely emphasize the protection of women's rights.

In Nigeria, many of these frameworks have been domesticated at federal and state levels, alongside other laws reflecting the country's socio-political realities. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (Chapter IV, Sections 33–46) guarantees fundamental rights including the right to life, dignity of the human person, and freedom from discrimination. These rights apply to all citizens regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, or social status; thus rape constitutes a human rights violation and a criminal offence against the state (Michael & Bamigbose, 2024). However, the extent to which the Nigerian government, particularly Lagos State, has prioritized the fight against rape through these laws remains uncertain.

Beyond constitutional provisions, Nigeria has also domesticated several international and regional frameworks to protect citizens from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, while ensuring survivors' access to legal, medical, educational, and property rights (Action for Justice, 2017).



At the state level, the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) was established in 2014 to address sexual and gender-based violence in Lagos State. The initiative adopted a victim-centred, offender-focused, and trauma-informed approach aimed at reducing re-victimisation, ensuring respectful treatment of survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable (Lagos State Ministry of Justice, 2022). According to the DSVRT (2016), prosecutors apply a victim-centred prosecutorial strategy, carefully assessing each case, protecting survivors' rights under existing laws, and determining whether sufficient evidence exists or further investigation is required before filing charges. Subsequently, the response team was transformed into an agency through enabling legislation to strengthen its operational effectiveness in the state.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design using a mixed-method approach, employing both qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection. The study population comprised the 14,920,049 residents of Lagos State (NPC, 2022). The target population included rape victims and their relatives, civil liberty organisations (CLOs) handling sexual violence cases, the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (LDSVA), staff of the Family Support Unit (FSU) and Gender Unit (GU) of the State Criminal Investigation Department (State CID), Nigeria Police, Lagos State Command, as well as religious and traditional leaders.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. Forty (40) volunteers and staff of CLOs with knowledge of rape and sexual violence issues were purposively selected from organisations such as the Women and Youth Development Initiatives, the International Federation of Women Lawyers (Lagos State Chapter), the Mirabel Sexual Assault Referral Centre, and Stand to End Rape. Additionally, forty (40) staff members of the LDSVA and security operatives attached to the FSU and GU were purposively selected. Twenty-five (25) rape victims and their relatives were selected through snowball sampling, while ten (10) religious and community leaders were included based on their knowledge of the subject.

Oral and Key Informant Interview (KII) sessions were conducted with two representatives each from the selected government and non-governmental organisations, while eight (8) victims and relatives participated in In-depth Interviews (IDI). A total of 105 copies questionnaire were administered, of which 99 were retrieved. In addition, 12 oral interviews were conducted, comprising seven (7) KIIs and five (5) IDIs.

The validity of the research instruments was ensured through expert review and pre-testing. Quantitative data were presented using tables, frequencies, and percentages, while qualitative interview data were analysed thematically. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Ilorin, and permission was secured from relevant agencies in Lagos State before data collection. Parents or guardians provided oral consent for participants aged 17 and below, while those 18 and above consented independently. Participation was voluntary, respondents could withdraw at any stage without consequence, and confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the study.



RESULT

Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of the respondents (n=99)

Variable	Grouping	Frequency(n=99)	Percentages %
Age	12 – 30	39	39.39
	31- 40	32	32.32
	41-50	21	21.21
	51 & above	7	7.07
Gender	Male	26	26.26
	Female	73	73.74
Occupation	Civil Servants	23	23.2
	NGOs	15	15.1
	students	9	9.3
	unemployed	19	19.31
	others	33	33.3
	Category of the respondents	CLOs	38
	LSDSVA	9	8.9
	Religious and community leaders	9	8.9
	Rape victims and relative	24	24.2
	Security Agency	19	19.19

Source: Researcher Field Survey: 2025

The data in Table 1 show that 39.39% of respondents were aged 12–30, 32.32% were 31–40, 21.21% were 41–50, and 7.07% were 51 years and above. This indicates that the majority of respondents (39.39%) were within the 12–30 age brackets, suggesting that youths who often victims or members of civil liberty organisations largely dominated the study. Regarding gender distribution, 26.3% of respondents were male, while 74% were female, indicating a higher participation of females in the study. With respect to occupation, 23.3% were civil servants, 15.1% NGO staff, 28.3% students, 19.3% unemployed, and 20.1% engaged in other occupations, showing diverse occupational representation



What is the effect of government measures against rape in Lagos State?

Table 2: Perception of Respondents on the effect of government measures against rape in Lagos State

Variables	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Mean score
It has enhanced smooth prosecution of rapist	41(41.41)	1(1.01)	-	2(2.02)	55(55.56)	2.23
easy access to rape victims	47(47.47)	44(44.45)	2(2.02)	5(5.05)	1(1.01)	4.12
It has enhanced rape complaint's confidence	59(59.60)	36(36.36)	1(1.01)	3(3.03)	-	4.67
It has enhanced socio-security network for rape victim,	44(44.44)	50(50.51)	1(1.01)	4(4.04)	-	4.52
reduction of rape incidences	1(1.01)	34(34.34)	-	0(0.0)	64(64.65)	2.14

Source: Researcher field survey, 2025

Finding from the above table showed Lagos State government measures has enhanced rape complaint's confidence with 96% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed to this effect. Similar to this, 94% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that the measures has positive effects on socio- security network for rape victim and 91% of the respondents asserted that the effects of the measures can be felt on easy access to rape victims. The three stated effects scored above the 3:00 bench marks of mean score which implies that Lagos State government measures against rape incidents has some positive effects on rape victims. Corroborating these findings, different sources of oral evidence obtained from interview sessions demonstrated that victims, victim's relatives and sympathizers recognised and felt encouraged with the efforts of Lagos government to the plight of rape victim. A victim who had experienced sexual assault narrated her experience in getting justice:

The first time my brother in-law raped me, I was so scared to report to the police because nobody will believed my story; I have to open up and informed my pastor who directed me to LSDVA to launch complain. Firstly they arranged for another shelter for me through an NGO. I was encouraged to open up during the prosecution stages assuring me of my safety IDI/ Female / Rape -victim/ 2024.

An NGO's volunteer who is conversant with the activities of LSDVA corroborated with the above assertion:



Government has special medical personnel and hospital where they conduct a check on a victim to ascertain facts. Besides, they handle the matter in more-civilized manner before transferring it to police for further investigation and prosecution if need be. Through door to door campaign of the agency, many of the victim or relative feel secured and free to lay complain about rape incidence KII/ Female / Human right activist/ 2024.

A victim relative elaborately explained how Lagos State government is responding to rape related matter positively:

One of the issues that enhance unreported rape cases is the insecurity of the victim or sympathizer. So, government had made arrangement for socio-security network for the victim. Under this arrangement, suspected rapist and his cohort will be prevented to intimidate the victim and every other persons sympathising with the victim. IDI/ Female/Victim relative / 2024.

The above finding negates the report of Amnesty International (2021), that despite the Nigerian authorities' declaration of a "state of emergency" on sexual and gender-based violence, rape persists with hundreds of cases of rape going unreported due to pervasive corruption, stigma and victim blaming. It is therefore obvious based on the finding of this study that Lagos measures have significant positive effects on safety and easy access to the rape victim in the State.

On the other hand, Findings of the study revealed that 57% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the measures enhanced smooth prosecution of rapist and also, 64% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed to the measures that it has effects in reducing rape incidences in Lagos State. Both statement scored below 3.00 mean score bench mark which implies that Lagos State government measures has no releasable effect on prosecution and reduction of rape incidences in Lagos State. Also, the evidence from oral interview sessions is not different from the above finding where respondents many of whom were members of civil liberty organizations asserted that government measures is not adequate enough to secure successful prosecution of rapist and reduction in the incidences

A lawyer working with FIDA explained further:

As soon as government agency handover or transfer the case to the police, they failed to follow up with the matter, given the suspect a window opportunity to escape justice since there is no complaint. While in some cases, to produce forensic evidence for prosecution has always been difficult for the government prosecutor. KII/ Female / Human right lawyer/ 2024.

A staff of the DSVAs has this to say:

The effectiveness and smooth prosecution are based on several factors beyond the limit of our agency or every other stakeholder involved. At the first instance, the victim who is at the centre of evidence may feel reluctant to



submit her for court procedure for the reason best known to her. And at the same time, without the cooperation of the security agency, prosecution of the suspect may be difficult because they have to make an arrest and produce the suspect at the court KII/ Female/HOD Sex Education /DSVA/ 2024.

The result of this finding aligned with the study of Longinus (2020) that needs to equip sexual violence first responders to enhance their capacities and capabilities in combating sexual violence. Also, study of Obibuba (2020) showed that there is somewhat non-significant relationship between anti-rape laws and policy in Nigeria and the degree of punishments meted out on perpetrators of rape. It can be deduced from the above findings that effort of Lagos government at mitigating rape incidence through prosecution has not yielded desired result.

What are the limitations Lagos government measures against Rape in Lagos State?

Table 3: Perception of Respondents on the limitations Lagos government measures against Rape in Lagos State

Variables	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Means score
Inadequate synergy between security agencies and LSDVA	20 (20.2)	52 (52.53)	20 (20.20)	5 (5.05)	2 (2.02)	3.21
Lack of forensic equipments to collect concrete evidence against rapist	34 (34.34)	54 (54.5)	7 (7.07)	4 (4.04)	0 (0.0)	4.05
Inadequate feedback from the prosecution process	31 (31.31)	60 (50.61)	5 (5.05)	3 (3.03)	0 (0.0)	3.67
Public stigmatisation of rape victim	21 (21.21)	4 (4.04)	11 (11.11)	7 (7.07)	56 (56.6)	2.23
Unreported rape incidence	21 (21.21)	54 (54.55)	13 (13.13)	7 (7.07)	4 (4.04)	3.17

Source: Researcher field survey, 2025

Result of the finding from table 3 showed that there are some factors limiting fight against rape in Lagos State. In terms of forensic equipments to collect concrete evidence against rapist, 88% of the respondents agreed that there no sufficient forensic equipment to obtained evidence



against rapist in the State. This result has 4.05 mean score indicating that lack of forensic equipment is a limitation to the fight against rape in Lagos State. Also, in the area of inadequate synergy between security agencies and LSDVA, majority of the respondents 72%, agreed and strongly agreed to this statement.

The result has 3.21 has the mean score implying that there is no sufficient cooperation between the government agency in charge rape matter and security agency. In similar vein, inadequate feedback from the prosecution process has 81% agreement as a limitation and unreported rape incidence with a result of 71% shared similar agreement of limitation to the fight against rape in Lagos State. Both statements have 3.67 and 3.17 mean scores which implies both statements are in line with as limitations. Oral interview evidence is not different to this finding.

According to security operative with gender unit, CID of the Nigeria Police:

We are guided by law in our operations. In that regard, there is a limit to what we can do without evidence against the suspect. And I think that is where the problem occurs. We can only send for a forensic medical investigation; we don't have the equipment to do it. And not until we have evidence against the suspect, prosecution will be stalled KII/ Female/inspector /NPF/ 2024.

Another security operative has this to say:

The complaint coming from a third party is the issue. The victim, in many instances, is not bold enough to speak out. Sometime the victim will return to withdraw without the notice of the third party being the LSDVA. Though it is a crime against the state, victim evidence is critical to the successful prosecution process KII/ Male/DSP /NPF/ 2024.

A Staff of LSDVA said succinctly:

Unreported rape cases are many outside. It is a great challenge. And that is why we kept telling the public to feel free to come to us and complain so that we could help secure justice KII/ Female/HOD Sex Education /DSVA/ 2024.

The above findings showed different dimensions of factors limiting the measures of the Lagos government in fighting rape in the state. These limitations included inadequate synergy between security agencies and LSDVA, a lack of forensic equipment to collect concrete evidence against rapists, and inadequate feedback from the prosecution process. Another contributing factor is unreported rape incidence. This result is similar to the argument of Obagboye (2019) that the problem of low reporting of rape cases in Nigeria was due to the insensitive and dismissive attitude of the police.

Also aligned with the finding is the study of Obagboye (2019) that many of the rape cases are thrown away in the law courts because of lack of evidence and distortion of evidence by law enforcement agents. However, the finding negates the submission of Chimezule (2023) that there is a gap in the justice system as an impediment to the fight against rape, thereby calling for amendment in the laws. It is therefore obvious that not only limited laws against rape matters or



constitutional definitions limiting the fight against rape, but some other factors also limit the fight against this menace in Lagos State.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study and existing studies, this study concluded that the Lagos government over the years has developed some laudable measures in mitigating rape-related crime in the state. These measures have positive effects in enhancing the socio-security network for rape victims, promoting rape complaints' confidence, and providing easy access to rape victims, but they did not enhance smooth prosecution of rapists, nor did they reduce rape occurrence in the state. This was due to some limitations confronting the state measures, such as inadequate synergy between security agencies and LSDVA, a lack of forensic equipment to collect concrete evidence against rapists, and inadequate feedback from the prosecution process. This study concluded that Lagos State measures against rape have positive effects on rape victims with limited effects to deter rapists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study hereby recommends that:

- i. There is an urgent need to strengthen institutional capacity towards investigation, prosecution, and conviction of rapists to serve as a deterrent for other intended rapists. Such capacity should involve buying modern forensic equipment and employment of experts that can conduct forensic investigations of rape-related crime.
- ii. To enhance efficiency and strong collaboration between the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (LSDSVA) and security agencies, a specialised unit of police detectives handling rape and other sexual offences should be integrated into the LSDSVA for improved coordination and management of such cases.
- iii. While commending the effort of the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency in providing a social-security platform for rape victims, sympathisers, or/and relatives, efforts should be directed towards socio-economic empowerment of the victim. So, that victim will be economically independent.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.



Authors' Contributions

Awolade O. E. conceived the study, including the design, and collated the data, handled the analysis and interpretation, while Adimula R.A. corrected, supervised and contributed to the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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