

“It couldn’t have been rape”: How Social Perception and Rape Scripts Influence Unacknowledged Sexual Assault in Nigeria

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Abstract

Empirical studies have established that the problem of rape aggravates if it is unacknowledged as a result of the influence of social perception and victim’s rape script. Such victims will be susceptible to psychological distress and lowered self-esteem among other negative effects. In Nigeria, the social perception of rape has been described as serving to perpetuate the sexual victimisation against women. This study therefore, examined how the social perception of rape impact on personal attitudinal beliefs of rape among female university students in the country and the extent to which rape scripts of young women lead to the growing rate of unacknowledged rape. Using a mixed-method victimisation survey that covered four universities in Lagos and Ogun states, Nigeria; the study recruited 206 female students who have experienced rape or attempted rape, while 12 of them were further engaged in in-depth interviews. The results of the study suggest that not acknowledging a rape is primarily a response to suffering an assault that is not consistent with societal definitions of rape and supporting script theory. The study also found that some of the strongly held rape myth among young female university students include; non-recognition of rape incidence between dating partners, non-recognition of domestic rape between husband and wife, rape is always for the sake of sex, rape is only perpetrated by stranger or mere acquaintances, women are mostly responsible for their rape victimisation and if the location of rape or sexual assault is the rapist’s house, then the woman is at fault. The key factors influencing rape script on sexual violence include; the use or unused of weapon, the venue of the rape event, the emotional attachment of the victim to the offender and the post-assault relationship between the victim and offender. The study concludes that the unacknowledged status of date rape by victims in the Nigerian society is mainly a factor of the acceptance of societal rape myth which impacted on the understanding of the women about what sex and rape is actually about. Consequently, appropriate measures needs to be taken by the government, women rights organisations and other stakeholders to enlighten the women to understand not only the real meaning of rape and sexual assault, but also the health implications of sexual violence irrespective of the personality of the offender.

Keywords: Rape, Victimisation, Rape scripts, Sexual assault, Unacknowledged rape

1. Introduction

The reasons behind some women acknowledging their victimisation as rape while others with similar experience do not, have been elusive. Rape has been defined as “vaginal penetration of a female against her will by force or threat of force without her consent” (Eckman, 2009:68). The Nigerian Criminal and Penal Codes continues to define rape in this way, although several women’s right organisations in the country have been clamouring for the broadening of the definition. Rape has been the subject of considerable controversy in terms of its definition (e.g., Muehlenhard and Linton, 1987) and frequency of occurrence (Koss, 1985). According to Ullman (2007) the traditional definition of rape emerged from the fact that historically, women were the legal property of their fathers and husbands, and rape was considered a crime against a man’s property (i.e., his wife or daughter), which was damaged or spoiled by the offence. Therefore, in order to be able to establish a case of rape, a woman is expected to resist a non-consensual sex physically, as it is on the basis of this that evidence of non-consensual could be established.

Empirical studies have been able to establish that in spite of the high rate of women agreeing to falling victims of non-consensual sexual intercourse, only very few of them agree to being raped (Castello et al., 2006; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2010). Consequent upon the development of the Sexual Experience Survey (SES) by Mary Koss (Koss and Oros, 1982), she was able to measure the extent to which women who indicated that they had not been raped, actually had an experience which would legally be defined as rape. This implies that they indicated they had non-consensual sexual intercourse due to force or treat of force, but responded “no” to the question-; “Have you ever been raped?” (Koss, 1985) Different explanations that mostly bothered on the different dating or sexual experiences of women, as well as their different attitudes or personalities have been offered (Layman, Gidycz and Lynn, 1996; McGregor, 2005; Castello et al., 2006).

According to Macy, Nurius and Norris (2006), scripts describe normal behaviours for particular events, and deviations from the ordinary require new interpretations. If a woman has a script that is descriptive of a rape blitz- that is, a situation where a woman is attacked, often outdoors, by a stranger who is likely to have a weapon, threatens physical violence, and possibly inflict injuries and pain while engaging in the forcible sex with the victim- this remains the idea of rape that the individual will keep in her mind (Weis and Borges, 1973 Russell,

1975; Parrot, 1991). They went further to state that if the woman is raped by an assailant who was known and trusted, indoors, in which there was little or no force, there would be a discrepancy between her rape experience and her rape script. As a result of this discrepancy, it is possible for the victim to view the incident as something other than rape. Empirical studies have been able to establish that women have different rape and seduction scripts (Ryan, 1988; Layman, Gidycz and Lynn, 1996; Sable et al., 2006). In a study of college women conducted by Ryan (1988), results shows that rape scripts, when compared to seduction scripts, contains more aggression by the attacker, more resistance by the victim, and resembles a blitz rape. It has also being suggested by Bourque (1989) and Parrot (1991) that the factor that determines labelling sexual experience as rape is the degree of aggression or level of force that is used by the aggressor. They posited that it is possible for several women to perceive non-consensual sex with an acquaintance as extreme seduction instead of rape.

The social perception of rape in Nigeria has been described as serving to perpetuate the sexual victimisation against women (Amaka-Okafor, 2013). In the country, women that allege rape are often looked upon with some degree of scepticism. Though there is no factual basis in reality for the social beliefs in rape myth in the country, it strongly affects the disposition of the society to rape victimisation. Also, unlike what obtains in other countries, stigmatisation is considered as one of the strongest factors inhibiting the reporting of rape as the Nigerian society are strongly prejudiced against victims (Amaka-Okafor, 2013; Chiedu, 2013). Rape victims are often perceived as facilitating their victimisation through 'suggestive attitudes' and 'indecent dressing'; in spite of the fact that there is no constitutional law that regulates dressing in the country. Therefore, victims of rape or sexual assault are perceived as people of low moral virtues that must have led their assailants to the crime 'one way or the other'. Amaka-Okafor (2013) described this social perception of rape by Nigerians as 'a culture of rape'. She condemned the non-recognition of domestic rape (between husband and wife) by the nation's constitution as a factor that fuels the culture of rape in the country. This, by extension may account for the reason for the low reporting of date rape as the female partner will be roundly condemned by the public if she comes out to report being raped by her boyfriend. In this case, it has been reported that even the law enforcement agents makes mockery of such report by victims as they often consider it inconceivable for a girl to report being raped by her boyfriend (Chiedu, 2013). Also in Nigeria, it is almost inconceivable for a married woman to report a case of rape or sexual violence against her husband. This, according to Amaka-Okaror (2013), by extension, impacts on the perception of victims of date rape about the status of their sexual violent experience.

Parrot (1991) arrived at four reasons that could make victims not to term their rape experience as such: concern for the rapist, self-blame, the social stereotype of "real" rape, and the victim's attempt to repress the rape memory. Based on the reasons aforementioned, this present study is especially interested in what Parrot referred to as the social stereotype of the "real" rape as it applies to Nigerian social environment. That is, the study tries to examine the prospect that the high rate of unacknowledged rape in the country will be due to the mismatch between victims' "rape experience" and their "rape script" based on their acceptance of rape myth of the Nigerian society. In the present study, I investigated how the social perception of rape and the rape scripts impacts on the attitudinal perception of victims of sexual assault in their reporting behaviour. This is in order to identify the determining factors in labelling sexual experience as rape among young women in the universities. The study was informed by the low rate of rape reporting by students of tertiary institutions in the country in spite of the increasing reports of rape and sexual assault across in the country. In addition, there is a dearth of empirical studies and literature on victimology of rape and sexual assault in the country. Most of the reports and materials available on the new wave of the social menace are journalistic that lacks adequate empiricism. In order to cover the gaps in literature, especially from Nigerian perspective, the study explored the acceptance of rape myth and how it modulates the rape scripts of acknowledged and unacknowledged rape victims in the country. The aim of this study was therefore, to examine how the social perception of rape impact on personal attitudinal beliefs of rape among female university students in Nigeria; and to determine the extent to which rape scripts of young women lead to the growing rate of unacknowledged rape in the country?

2. Methods and Materials

Criminal victimisation studies are useful research instruments to deal with the problem of inadequate statistics and to more accurately pinpoint problems within society (Van Dijk, van Kesteren and Smit, 2008). This study is designed to enable stakeholders of sexual violence in the country to be more aware of the largely underreported crime and fate of the victims which has dire consequences on public health, in order for authorities to take appropriate measures to confront the crime. A mixed-method research approach was adopted for the study with the use of both qualitative and quantitative research instruments. This study conducted a mixed-method victimisation survey that covered four universities in Lagos and Ogun states, Nigeria. The universities were purposively selected for the study based on the quick positive responses received from female students of the institutions to participate in the research. The four (4) universities, located in the South-western part of the country are; Tai Solarin University of Education, Olabisi Onabanjo University (both in Ogun State), University of Lagos and Lagos State University.

Fliers advertising the study were posted around the campuses recruiting women to be in a study about their

beliefs and sexual history. In order to enhance anonymity and encourage participation, all personal information that could lead to the identification of the respondent were excluded from the questionnaires while telephone interviews were allowed for those that prefers it to face-to-face interview method. Female research assistants were recruited from the four selected schools and trained to provide the participants with brief description of the study and get them to sign consent form to express their willingness to participate in the research. The initial participants of 400 female students of the four schools (100 from each school) were administered several questions to screen for victimisation experiences, especially experience of rape or attempted rape. There were six items drawn from the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES) (Koss and Gidycz, 1985), which sought to find out if participants have experienced such violent sexual encounters any man without their consent.

Participants who endorsed having had an experience of rape or attempted rape based on their responses to the SES were then asked to provide several details about the circumstances of the assault on a separate page, adapted from Layman et al. (1996), including information about the force used by the assailant, sexual history of the victim, the relationship of the victim and offender, emotional response of the victim, and the resistance strategies used by the victim. In another section, they were asked to offer responses on their perception of the meaning of sex and rape, their knowledge of the social beliefs on sex and rape between dating partners, the post-rape relationship with the assailant and whether they have had more than one of these experiences. Participants were also given several possible labels for their experience. Rape victims who did not label the assault as a crime (i.e. rape, attempted rape, or another crime) were considered unacknowledged. The same acknowledgment criterion was used for attempted rape victims. From the 400 responses solicited for the study, a total of 322 were returned properly filled, while 206 of these responded in the affirmative of having experienced rape or attempted rape. The distribution of the respondents in terms of their institutional affiliations for the 206 respondents whose responses aligns with the purpose of the study shows Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED) with 72 (34.95%) respondents, followed by Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) 66 (32.04%), Lagos State University (LASU) 33(16.02%) and University of Lagos (UNILAG) 35 (16.99%).

In respect of the qualitative survey, 12 respondents (four from each university) of the questionnaires that are victims of rape or/and attempted rape, and who consented into providing detailed information about their experience were engaged. The study designed an In-depth Interview Guide (IDI) that consisted of two sections of ten (10) questions which sought to elicit responses about the participants' perceptions and attitudinal beliefs about rape and sexual assault. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study including confidentiality. For both the quantitative and qualitative study, the data collection exercises were conducted between February and June, 2013. Data collected from the field was analysed in order to meet with the research objectives and answer the research questions raised. Information from in-depth interview collected with electronic tapes and notes were transcribed, synthesized and organised under thematic headings using software for qualitative analysis. Significant statements were quoted verbatim in order to corroborate or refute important findings. Information gathered from the questionnaire were analysed using statistical tools and the statistical programme for social sciences SPSS software.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

As evident in Table 1, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were quite diverse. The study shows that the respondents are relatively young with majority within age 21-25 (98, 47.57%). Those that are younger than the majority age category (21-25) are second in frequency with 56 (27.19%) of them participating in the research. The least age category that took part in the study are those that are 30years and above with 13 (6.31%). The age distribution of the study aligns with the age pattern of most of the higher institutions in the country, as postgraduate students usually account for the minority of student population in higher institutions. The respondents that are still in the first year of their studies accounts for the majority in this research with 54 (26.21%) participating. This is followed by those in year 3 (44, 21.36%), while 38 (18.45%) of 200 level students that took part made those in that category to come third. The least participated group in terms of their university level is the postgraduate students with 11 (5.34%). Apart from the numerical disadvantage of postgraduate students in most universities, students in their undergraduate studies are usually more favourably disposed to participate in survey research than their postgraduate counterparts. The research had more respondents from Tai Solarin University of Education (72, 34.95%) because that was the initial location of the study before it extended to respondents of other universities largely based on the recruitment of research assistants from other institutions. Finally, this study was limited to the female students who have either suffered rape or survived rape attempt in their sexual history. To this end, those that are victims of rape among the study's respondents are 153 (74.27%) while those that experienced attempted rape are 53 (25.73%). From the foregoing, the socio-demographics of the respondents evidently show that they are capable of adequately informing the study in achieving its objectives.

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age (in years)	16-20	56	27.19
	21-25	98	47.57
	26-30	39	18.93
	30+	13	6.31
	Total	206	100
Level in the University	100	54	26.21
	200	38	18.45
	300	44	21.36
	400	33	16.02
	500	26	12.62
	Postgraduate	11	5.34
	Total	206	100
Institutional Affiliation	Tai Solarin University of Ibadan	72	34.95
	Olabisi Onabanjo University	66	32.04
	Lagos State University	33	16.02
	University of Lagos	35	16.99
	Total	206	100
Type of Sexual Victimization	Rape	153	74.27
	Attempted rape	53	25.73
	Total	206	100

Source: Survey 2013

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Impact of Social Perception of Rape on Victims' Attitudes towards Sexual Assault

The pattern of response of the participants of the study suggests that they are mostly socialised and in agreement with the social perception of rape Nigerian society (as evident in Table 2 below).

Table 2: Responses to questions on perception and beliefs about sex and rape

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	6 (%)	Total
Sex is when there is penetration of the male organ into the female organ.	12 (5.83)	8 (3.88)	5 (2.43)	7 (3.40)	38 (18.44)	136 (66.02)	206 (100)
Finger penetration (fingering) and penetration of the mouth by penis are not real sex	21 (10.20)	11 (5.34)	13 (6.31)	15 (7.28)	41 (19.90)	105 (50.97)	206 (100)
Sex is normal in relationship between male and female	31 (15.05)	6 (2.91)	18 (8.74)	14 (6.80)	39 (18.93)	98 (47.57)	206 (100)
Sexual intercourse between a boyfriend and girlfriend cannot be seen as rape	11 (5.34)	34 (16.50)	11 (5.34)	21 (10.19)	47 (22.82)	82 (39.81)	206 (100)
Rape is when there is sexual intercourse without the consent.	10 (4.85)	6 (2.91)	21 (10.20)	11 (5.34)	37 (17.96)	121 (58.74)	206 (100)
Rape is when a stranger or mere acquaintance force a lady for sex	26 (12.61)	23 (11.17)	13 (6.31)	25 (12.14)	33 (16.02)	86 (41.75)	206 (100)
Rape is always for the sake of sex	10 (4.85)	19 (9.23)	8 (3.88)	7 (3.40)	21 (10.19)	141 (68.45)	206 (100)
A husband cannot rape his own wife	2 (0.97)	22 (10.68)	15 (7.28)	5 (2.43)	23 (11.16)	139 (67.48)	206 (100)
Women are mostly responsible for being raped	67 (32.52)	14 (6.80)	7 (3.40)	13 (6.31)	33 (16.02)	72 (34.95)	206 (100)
If a woman is raped in a man's house then it is her fault	34 (16.51)	36 (17.48)	12 (5.82)	2 (0.97)	21 (10.19)	101 (49.03)	206 (100)
A woman that wears sexy dress is likely to be raped	71 (34.47)	29 (14.08)	19 (9.23)	10 (4.85)	26 (12.61)	51 (24.76)	206 (100)

Legend: 1-Strongly Disagree; 2-Disagree; 3-Somewhat Disagree; 4-Somewhat Agree; 5-Agree; 6-Strongly Agree.

Source: Survey 2013.

They share the same view with the description of sex/rape by the Nigerian Criminal and Penal Codes with majority of them (136, 66.02%) strongly agreeing with sex being the penetration of the male organ into the female organ, while they equally strongly agree that finger penetration (fingering) and penetration of the mouth by penis are not real sex. This is contrary to the conventional definition of sex that acknowledges penetration of the anus by the penis (anal sex), penetration of the mouth by the penis or oral penetration of the vulva or vagina (oral sex), sexual penetration by the fingers (fingering), and sexual penetration by use of a strap-on dildo (Carroll, 2009; Crooks and Baur, 2010; Hammer, 2011). Majority of the respondents (98, 47.57%) also strongly agree that sex is a normal event in relationship between male and female, while only 31 (15.05%) strongly disagree with that. Similarly, 82 (39.81%) respondents, which account for the majority, are not favourably disposed to labelling any form of sexual intercourse between a boyfriend and girlfriend as rape, while 47 (22.82%) also agrees. Only 11 (5.34%) of them disagree strongly and 34 (16.50%) disagrees with this position. This may account for the reason that victims of date rape find it awkward to come forward to report. The social perception on male/female relationship is sex-laden, which makes parents and guardians to impede the development of such relationship between their teenage wards and opposite sex if/when they can. It can hardly be conceived that there would be a dating relationship without the temptation of sexual intercourse. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (121, 58.74) however, strongly agrees, and 37 (17.96%) agrees with part of the conventional definition of rape and as also contained in the definition Nigerian Criminal Code, Penal Code and Sha'ria Law which identifies rape as a non-consensual sexual intercourse. The study also tested the acceptance of participants of another common rape myth in Nigeria which often label rape as a stranger crime. Majority of the respondents (86, 41.75%) 'strongly agrees' that rape is a stranger or mere acquaintance crime, while 33 (16.02%) also agrees. Meanwhile, 26 (12.61%) of them 'strongly disagrees' with that and 23 (11.17%) also 'disagrees'. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (141, 68.45%) strongly accept that rape is always for the sake of sex, while only 10 (4.85%) and 19 (9.23%) of them strongly disagree and disagree respectively.

There is also an overwhelming agreement with the social perception of rape as respondents (139, 67.48%) hold that husbands have absolute sexual right over their wives and cannot rape his own wife, while only 2 (0.97%) of them strongly disagree. In support of another popular socially perceived rape myth in the Nigerian society, the respondents (72, 34.95%) opted for 'strongly agree' with the motion that women are mostly responsible for being raped. However, those that 'strongly disagrees' with the motion came a close second with 67 (32.52%) respondents. Furthermore, while a total of 105 (50.97%) respondents strongly agree or agree, a distant 81 (39.32%) strongly disagree and disagree. This shows their strong acceptance of the societal rape myth that women have to be blamed one way or the other for falling victim of rape. Then on the social perception that a lady should not have any course to be in a man's house except she is comfortable with anything that happens. The respondents also align with that as majority (101, 49.03%) of them strongly agrees that if a woman gets raped in the house of a man, then it is her fault. There is a common rape myth statement of "what was she doing there (in the man's house) in the first place?" anytime there is a report of rape of a woman in the house of a man in whatever guise. Out of the 12 common social perception of rape included in the questionnaire, the only one in which majority strongly disagree (71, 34.47%) with is the motion that "wearing sexy dresses makes a woman invite being raped". Fifty-one (24.76%) of them strongly agree with that position and 26 (12.61) agree as well.

In summary, out of the 12 common social perception and myth about rape and sex, the respondents are in agreement with 11 of them which remarkably shaped their understanding of the concept of 'sex' and 'rape'. The respondents of the qualitative study further provided details to the direction of the responses of the survey. All the 12 agreed that women have some roles to play in falling victims to rape or sexual assault. They made statements like "women trust a lot and fall prey to the antics of men", "if you are not ready for it (sex) then stay off men or dating relationship" "you cannot be enticing (teasing) men especially your man (boyfriend) with sexy dresses and expect him to remain calm", "a man will always be a man but it is for ladies to keep herself safe if she doesn't want sexual relationship". The entire respondents believed that except in cases of stranger rape, women plays a strong part in becoming victim of date rape from the moment that agree to go into a relationship with the man. As one of them puts it:

...a woman must be ready to accept responsibility for the choice that she makes, if she goes into a relationship with a man, goes to his house and then gets raped, how will she come to the public to claim that?...she will be seen as a joke...

(Shalewa, 22, TASUED, Ijebu-Ode)

This represents a general opinion amongst the participants of the study whose understanding of sex and rape was evidently shaped by society myth. This result clearly aligns with that of Peterson and Muehlenhard (2004) that some women are susceptible to rape myth acceptance. However, in the case of this study, majority of the women are susceptible to the social perception of rape and this shaped their self-perception of sex and rape.

3.2.2 Influence of Rape Scripts on Unacknowledged Rape

Prior research has shown that various situational factors and behaviours can affect one's perception of whether a rape has occurred (Vandiver and Dupalo, 2013). The belief of scholars is that the nature of the rape event would

be largely influenced by the personality of the offender, the amount of force exerted, the use or unused of weapon, the venue of the rape event, the emotional attachment of the victim to the offender, the condition of the mind of the victim or offender (whether under the influence of drugs) and the postassault relationship between the victim and offender (Abarbanel, 1986; Brecklin and Ullman, 2005; Gidycz et al., 2006). The study moved to examine the rape scripts of the respondents by testing it against the varying situational conditions of the sexual violence that they experienced. First they were requested to indicate the relationship with the man (rapist) at the time of the experience. Table 3 shows their response.

Table 3: Relationship between the respondents and their Sexual Assailant

Relationship with the assaulter	N	Percentage (%)
Stranger	57	27.67
Just Met	33	16.02
Acquaintance (Classmate, neighbour etc.)	28	13.59
Friend	49	23.79
Dating Casually (early stage of dating)	25	12.14
Steady date (Romantic partner)	6	2.91
Relative	8	3.88
Total	206	100

Source: Survey 2013

Evident from the table above, majority of the sexual violence that the respondents of the study suffered were in the hands of strangers (57, 27.67%), closely followed by their friends (49, 23.79%), those they just met (33, 16.02%), their acquaintances (28, 13.59%) and those that they were still in early dating relationship with (25, 12.14%). Interestingly, only 6 (2.91%) acknowledges the sexual violence they suffered from their romantic partner. In order to determine the role played by the victim to facilitate their victimisation, they were asked to state if they engaged in any suggestive act- What consensual physical activities had you engaged in with this man before this experience? Table 4 shows their response:

Table 4: Responses on whether they had consensual physical activities with the assailant before the incidence

Consensual physical activities preceding the assault	N	Percentage (%)
None	147	71.36
Kissing only	31	15.05
Petting above the waist	22	10.68
Petting below the waist	4	1.94
Sexual intercourse	2	0.97
Total	206	100

Source: Survey 2013

The respondents largely stated that they made no suggestive gesture to the assailant before being assaulted, as majority of them (147, 71.36%) indicated. Twenty-one (15.05%) of them however kissed the assailant, while 22 (10.68%) went as far as petting the man above his waist. The fact that only 2 (0.97%) of the respondents indicated that they had sexual intercourse with their assailant prior to being raped may not necessarily imply that the respondents suffered less of rape acts from their romantic sexual partners, as subsequent investigation of this study suggests, the rape scripts of the respondents may be in disagreement with the possibility that a romantic sexual partner can engage in acts that can be perceived as rape by someone that they are in existing sexual relationship with. This therefore makes it imperative for the study to examine closely the romantic relationship of the respondents as previous studies have indicated that most rape cases or sexual violence between romantic partners are hidden or conceived differently by the victim (Layman et al., 1996; Peterson and Muehlenhard, 2004).

Though, only 6 (2.91%) of the respondents had earlier identified their assailant as romantic partner, the study moved to examine if they have had similar experience of being assaulted by their dating partner which was not categorised as rape or attempted rape in table 3. Therefore, they were asked to respond to a question- have you ever had sexual encounter with your boyfriend (romantic partner) that you didn't consent to? In spite of them not acknowledging it earlier, majority of the respondents (117, 56.80%) have encountered sexual experience that qualifies as rape in the conventional definition of the word. However, they may not have perceived it as "rape" based on the personality of the assailant and the rape scripts of the respondents. One of the qualitative respondents provided reasons for this:

...how can I take the forced sex that I had with my boyfriend as rape. That was not the first time that we had sex. It was just that sometimes when you are not in the mood, your man (partner) may refuse to show understanding and insist in his own way...on one occasion, he went as far as hitting me vigorously on my chest and my face because I put up a strong resistance against him. I wanted

to call it quit but he begged me and he bought me gifts after. I forgave me, what can I do, I love him...

(Cynthia, 24, LASU)

Another respondents state her experience:

...not once, not twice, quite a number of times...on one occasion, he wrongly accused me of dating somebody, I was really angry, so when he requested for sex, I refused. He got very mad, accusing me that I was denying him sex because I enjoy it better with the other guy. He pounced on me and torn my dress, he was very rough with me all through, I got injured. After he finished, he got up and just walked away. Thank God it happened in my room...I really felt ashamed...I walked out of the relationship...

(Tina, 27, LASU)

In spite of the level of violence involved in the event, Tina did not perceive it as rape; she rather termed it a “forced sex from a boyfriend borne out of misunderstanding.” Moving forward, in order to further understand the nature of the violent sexual experience that the victims (117, 56.80%) suffered in the hands of their romantic partners, they were asked to identify the methods of force that the man used during the incident (selecting all that applies to them). Table 4 shows their response:

Table 4: Methods of force used by romantic partners on the victims

Method of force	N	Percentage (%)
Verbal threats to harm you or others	11	9.40
Using his superior body weight	91	77.78
Twisting your arm or holding you down	78	66.67
Hitting or slapping you	61	52.14
Choking or beating you	21	17.95
Showing or using a weapon	4	3.42

Source: Survey 2013

The use of superior body accounts for the most predominant method (91, 77.78%) that was used to subdue the resistance of the victims by their romantic partners. The twisting of the arm and being held down is second most used method (78, 66.67), while hitting and slapping is another commonly used method (61, 52.14%). This implies that there were reasonable use of force by the date partners that could effectively make the experience fall into the category of violent date rape, particularly if the victims didn’t consent to being treated that way. Hence, the study made attempt to enquire the resistance put up by the victims in order to determine if they were at home with the way they were treated during the incident. Table 5 shows their response to the question; What did you do during the incident to show that you did not want to engage in that activity (mark all that apply)?

Table 5: Responses of the victims to the express their non-consensual to the activity

Method of victims’ response	N	Percentage (%)
Turned cold	21	17.95
Pleaded with him	101	86.32
Cried	81	69.23
Screamed for help	77	65.81
Ran away	16	13.68
Physically struggled	96	82.05
Hit him with an object	43	36.75
I laid back and enjoyed it	3	2.56

Source: Survey 2013

The responses shown is indicative that the respondents were mainly victims of unsolicited violent date rape as evidence from the table shows that they didn’t consent to being treated the way they were on such occasion. Only 3 (2.56%) of the respondents wanted such experience while the main response was “plead with him” (101, 86.32%) to stop the violence. The second most frequent defence put up by the respondents was to cry (81, 69.23%) while those that screamed for help was equally significant (77, 65.81%). Meanwhile, 43 (36.75%) fought back with some measure of violence.

The study moved to find out if the respondents continued having romantic relationship with the man after experiencing such violent sex. Majority of the respondents (63, 53.85%) stated that they continued having romantic relationship with the man after experiencing the violent sexual intercourse the first time, while 54 (46.15%) quitted the relationship. This further adds currency to the trend of their responses that imply that the respondents have failed to acknowledge their experience as rape. Finally, they were asked to describe the experience that they went through with the man. Table 6 shows their responses to the question- What term do you think best describes your experience?

Table 6: Responses on what they think best describe their experience

What best describe the experience	N	Percentage (%)
Rape	3	2.56
Attempted rape	1	0.86
Some other type of crime	22	18.80
Mis-communication or misunderstanding	17	14.54
Seduction	3	2.56
Weird, forced or crazy sex	19	16.24
Not sure	52	44.44
Total	117	100

Source: Survey 2013

Majority of the respondents (52, 44.44%) are unable to describe their sexual violent experience with their romantic partner as they indicated that they were “not sure” of what to term it as. This is followed by those that termed it “some other type of crime” (22, 18.80%) as they understand it wasn’t right but still cannot term it as ‘rape’. Interestingly, 19 (16.24%) of them see it as a ‘weird, forced or crazy form of sex’ and 17 (14.54%) prefers to see it as a consequence of misunderstanding or mis-communication. This implies that the respondents still do not consider their experience as rape even though they realise it was wrong to be treated in that manner, especially without their consent.

4. Discussion of Findings

In the present study, the percentage of women who are unacknowledged victims of rape was 56.80%. This percentage was greater than that obtained by Koss (1985) mainly due to the variations in the social perception of rape between the environment where Koss conducted her study and that of the Nigerian social environment which may have impacted differently on the rape scripts of Nigerian women. The outcomes of the study support the positions of studies that stated that unacknowledged victims would be more likely to write scripts describing blitz or stranger rape than acknowledged victims (Koss, 1985; Sawyer, Thompson, and Chicorelli 2002; McGregor, 2005; Gidycz et al., 2006). The rape scripts of the respondents of the study are largely shaped by the common social perception of rape. The scripts of the acknowledged victims described the assailant as stranger and friends that they are not in dating relationship with while the scripts of those that failed to acknowledge their victimisation does not perceive sexual violence from romantic partners as date rape. Furthermore, the details of the scripts of the unacknowledged victims tended to fit the social perception of rape situation. According to Gartner and MacMillan (2005), they were more likely to say rape occurred outdoors, more likely to mention physical attack and use or threat of use of weapons, less likely to say the victim used verbal protest but more likely to say she struggled with the assailant, more likely to mention the victim reported the rape to the police and that the assailant left the scene.

The results of the study suggest that not acknowledging a rape is primarily a response to suffering an assault that is not consistent with societal definitions of rape, supporting script theory. The respondents do not believe that finger penetration (fingering) and penetration of the mouth by penis are real sex as against conventional definitions, the clamouring of various women’s right, nongovernmental organisations and the feminists theorists (Carroll, 2009; Crooks and Baur, 2010; Hammer, 2011). The understanding they showed to what sex was aligns however with the description provided by the Nigerian Criminal and Penal Code as well as the Sharia law. This indicate that there is a strong influence of the Nigerian meanings ascribed to sex and rape by constituted authorities and the understanding of the sex and rape among young Nigerian women. The study also found that some of the strongly held rape myth among young female university students include; non-recognition of rape incidence between dating partners, non-recognition of domestic rape between husband and wife, rape is always for the sake of sex, rape is only perpetrated by stranger or acquaintances, women are mostly responsible for their rape victimisation and if the location of rape or sexual assault is the rapist’s house, then the woman is at fault. The acceptance of these myths by the respondents of the study is indicative of the influence that the myths would have on rape reporting in the country. Since the conception of what rape is significantly excuse sexual violence between dating partners, there is tendency that the non-acknowledgement and reporting of date rape will continue to be prevalent in the Nigerian social environment.

Further comparison of the acquaintance and stranger scripts of the unacknowledged victims with studies on acknowledged victims found little or no differences in regards to assailant aggression, victims' physical and emotional trauma, or assailant reaction following the rape, although stranger scripts were more likely to depict an outdoor attack and less likely to have the victim only use verbal protest or remain silent. This indicates that the personality of the assailant is a major determining factor in the acknowledgement of rape incidence (Layman et al., 1997; Whatley, 2005; Tjaden and Thoennes, 2010). However, the study found that unacknowledged victims perceive date scripts differently even though they had an experience of forced sexual intercourse with their romantic partners and wrote a script depicting date rape, these women still did not acknowledge that they

had been raped. This suggests that their inability to recognise their experience as rape is dependent on more than just the nature of the relationship between the assailant and the victim. Other characteristics of the rape script or characteristics of the individuals may also be involved in the decision to label a sexual experience as rape. One important variable may be the level of force used in the actual rape which may have corresponded with their rape script.

On a number of the SES items, the study found differences between unacknowledged and acknowledged date rape victims, with fewer unacknowledged date rape victims reporting sexual experiences involving force than acknowledged victims. This corroborated the findings of Reilly et al. (2012), who asserted that the unacknowledged victims were more likely to include physical attack in their rape scripts. Therefore, the absence of actual physical attacks, contained in victims' rape scripts but not present in their actual rape experience, leads these unacknowledged date rape victims not to regard their experience as rape. This finding is also consistent with the results of research by Whatley (2005), Castello et al., (2006) and Reilly (2012), who have argued that level of force used in the sexual encounter may be one of the most important variables in determining whether the experience is considered rape. Apart from the aforementioned, other important factors that influence the rape script on sexual violence include; the use or unused of weapon, the venue of the rape event, the emotional attachment of the victim to the offender and the post-assault relationship between the victim and offender. The findings of the study in this regard align with the position of Boesch, Sales and Koss, (1998), Sturza and Campbell (2005), and Withey (2007). There are more studies that have focused and established the mismatch between a victim's rape experience and her conceptualization of rape. Individuals studying unacknowledged rape from the perspective of definitions and personal rape script have focused on both the mismatch with societal definitions of rape (Layman et al., 1996) and with the victim's personal rape script (Gamper, 2004).

In summary, it could be argued that the influence of social perception of rape in the conception of sexual violence among Nigerian young women is strong enough to impact on their rape script and their understanding of sex and rape outside the conventional definition. Also, the less violent nature of date rape and the romantic involvement of the victim with the offender are factors that equally impacts on the perception that victims have about the term to use to describe their experience. This position implies that there must be specific approaches that would be used to bring about some reorientation of the women in the country in order to assist them in assigning their own meaning to the experience instead of society's stereotypical ideas regarding rape.

5. Conclusion

This study submits that unacknowledged rape victims, compared to acknowledged rape victims, are more likely to have rape scripts in which the assailant is a stranger, and in which the assailant, whether stranger or acquaintance, uses a high level of force. In addition, unacknowledged victims' own rape and non-rape sexual experiences were likely to have involved less force when compared to acknowledged victims. In other words, the unacknowledged rape victim is likely to be a woman who has not encountered the amount of force in sexual relations that is contained in her script of rape which involves considerable force. However, studies have established that the problem of rape aggravates if it is unacknowledged as a result of the influence of social perception of rape and victim's rape script. In this case, the victim will be susceptible to psychological distress and lowered self-esteem among other negative effects. This study concludes that the unacknowledged status of date rape by victims in the Nigerian society is mainly a factor of the acceptance of societal rape myth which impacted on the understanding of the women about what sex and rape is actually about. It is the submission of this study that appropriate measures need to be taken by the government, women rights organisations and other stakeholders to enlighten the women to understand not only the real meaning of rape and sexual assault, but also the health implications. There's need for women to seek for counselling and medical interventions when they fall victim. This is particularly imperative given that unacknowledged victims are more likely to continue to associate with the man who raped them, as the results of the study suggested.

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