

The Impact of Language in Eradicating the Menace of Rape Against the Girl Child in Lagos State

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of language in eradicating the menace of rape against the girl child. Utilizing qualitative method, the research investigates how linguistic strategies in education, media, and policy can contribute to changing societal attitudes and reducing incidences of sexual violence. The study employed a descriptive research design of the survey type. The survey included a total of 100 respondents, consisting of 60 students from secondary schools, 10 teachers and educators, 15 media workers, and 15 policymakers and law enforcement officials. The study employed a simple random sampling technique to select the participants. The questionnaire, tagged "Language and Eradication of Rape Menace (LERM)," was created for the study and then tested for validity and reliability. The findings of the study revealed the importance of inclusive and empowering language, the role of media in shaping public perception, and the necessity of policy frameworks that emphasize protective and rehabilitative measures. The study recommends the integration of comprehensive sex education that employs inclusive and powerful language. Also, it recommends the adoption of criteria to ensure sensitive and respectful reporting on sexual abuse, along with their enforcement.

Keywords: Language; rape; girl child; societal attitudes; media; education; policy

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Introduction

Language is the most important medium of communication. Obadare and Ojo (2020) opine that language is a peculiarity of man and a God's given gift for us to verbalize our hopes, aspirations, joy or otherwise. Without it, man's existence will be meaningless. Language and man are inseparable while the major distinctive feature between man and lower animals is his ability to use language to talk about a variety of issues.

In addition Oluwole & Olanrewaju (2018) asserts that language is one of the wonderful gifts possessed by man. Rape on the other hand is a vice that is becoming and very common in modern Nigerian society. The incidence of rape is increasingly prevalent and has become a significant cause for concern that must be reduced to the lowest possible level. It is disconcerting to discover that certain locations are no longer secure for young girls and women to stroll unaccompanied due to the apprehension of being subjected to rape or sexual assault. In numerous countries, there has been a significant distortion of sexual behaviour to the point where the human environment is no longer

secure for those who are susceptible to sexual exploitation. Currently, parents and guardians experience apprehension regarding the potential risks that their children and wards may encounter when commuting to school or being unsupervised at home. This is due to several occurrences in which children, particularly female youngsters, have been subjected to sexual assault while travelling to or from school or while at home when their parents are away for work.

Rape continues to be a contentious topic, with only a small number of victims coming forward due to various societal attitudes, lengthy legal processes to reach a conviction, and the lasting psychological and physical effects of the trauma. Sexual assault has a profound impact on the social and physical well-being of victims, as they frequently endure rejection, stigmatisation, and even contemplate suicide. Rape is a pervasive type of sexual assault, characterised by the unlawful act of coercing sexual consent or compliance using force or threats. Rape poses an omnipresent threat in various locations, and the certainty lies not in whether one will become a victim, but rather when it will happen (Ibekwe and Obiajulu, 2017).

It is regrettable to see that African culture, which was known for its communal life, mutual love, peace, and security, is today plagued by various crimes against humanity, including rape. This paper aims to tackle the pervasive issue of rape in Nigerian society and explore strategies for its complete eradication. This issue has caused significant damage to both girls and women. Discovering that rape and other forms of sexual assaults have devastating effects on the lives of numerous individuals, particularly women, is deeply discouraging.

Studies have indicated that the majority of rape victims are girls, comprising 91% of the cases, while males account for 9%. Additionally, males make up 99% of the perpetrators involved in these incidents (Whatley as reported in Peter & Olowa, 2010). In Nigeria, the annual occurrence of rape varies among all age groups analysed. The largest occurrence was observed among individuals aged 13 years and above, with a total of 175,200,255 cases reported over the three-year period from 2014 to 2016. The documented instances also demonstrated enhancement during the examined years, with rates of 0.47, 0.96, and 0.5 correspondingly (Idoko, Nwobodo, and Idoko, 2020). Despite the fact that individuals who are susceptible to the crime of rape are experiencing dread and uncertainty regarding potential harm in their surroundings, there is a lack of significant efforts to address and reduce this humongous problem.

Despite the fact that vulnerable individuals possess the entitlement to human dignity and the right to live without being subjected to such dangers, these rights have been violated in numerous nations. It is regrettable to discover that individuals who are susceptible to rape and sexual violence in numerous societies are devoid of assistance and optimism, despite being fellow citizens with identical rights to those who perpetrate these acts. Consequently, this is a distressing situation that necessitates immediate attention from all individuals who are concerned and have good intentions.

Sexual assault, especially against underage girls, is a widespread problem that has severe consequences for both individuals and communities, while language is a significant influence in both

promoting and addressing the frequency of this crime. The objective of this study is to investigate how language can be strategically used to address the problem of rape against underage girls.

Research Method

The study employed a descriptive research design of the survey type. The survey included a total of 100 respondents, consisting of 60 students from secondary schools, 10 teachers and educators, 15 media workers, and 15 policymakers and law enforcement officials in Lagos State. The study employed a simple random sampling technique to choose participants. The study sample comprised respondents of both genders.

The research instrument used in the study was a self-structured questionnaire consisting of 20 items. The questionnaire, tagged "Language and Eradication of Rape Menace (LERM)," was created for the study and then tested for validity and reliability. The Spearman-Brown split-half method yielded an internal consistency coefficient of 0.82. The survey was conducted among students and educators to evaluate their attitudes about rape and the efficacy of existing educational materials. A survey was carried out with media experts and decision-makers to gain insight into their viewpoints on language utilisation in journalism and policy formation. The survey's quantitative data was analysed using frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to address the four research questions posed in the study.

Result and Discussion

Research Question 1:

How the language does used in educational materials influence students' attitudes towards sexual violence and the girl-child?

Table 1: Responses to how the language used in educational materials influence students' attitudes towards sexual violence and the girl-child.

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
1	Educational materials in my school provide clear definitions of consent and sexual violence	69 (69.0)	23 (23.0)	7 (7.0)	1 (1.0)	3.40	.667
2	The language used in sex education classes at my school promotes respect and empathy towards the girl-child	39 (39.0)	51 (51.0)	9 (9.0)	1 (1.0)	3.72	.668
3	Educational materials in my school challenge stereotypes	60 (60.0)	35 (35.0)	5 (5.0)	0 (0.0)	3.45	.592

	and myths about rape and sexual violence						
4	The language in educational resources at my school empowers students to speak up against sexual violence	39 (39.0)	44 (44.0)	14 (14.0)	3 (3.0)	3.81	.787
5	I feel that the language used in the educational materials in my school helps foster a supportive environment for victims of sexual violence	63 (63.0)	25 (25.0)	12 (12.0)	0 (0.0)	3.49	.703

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of items 1 to 5 regarding the response to how the language used in educational materials influence students' attitudes towards sexual violence and the girl-child. The table shows the mean scores ranging from 3.40 – 3.81 and standard deviation values (.592 – .787). Analysis of statement revealed that (92.0%) of the respondents believed that educational materials in their school provide clear definitions of consent and sexual violence, while the remaining (8.0%) held contrary view.

It was further held that (90.0%) of the respondents indicated that the language used in sex education classes at their school promotes respect and empathy towards the girl-child, (95.0%) of the respondents said that educational materials in their schools challenge stereotypes and their myths about rape and sexual violence, (83.0%) of the respondents agree that the language in educational resources at their schools empowers students to speak up against sexual violence, while (88.0%) of the entire respondents held that they feel that the language used in their school's educational materials helps foster a supportive environment for victims of sexual violence.

Table 1 shows the response to how the language used in educational materials influence students' attitudes towards sexual violence and the girl-child. It was revealed that educational materials provide clear definitions of consent and sexual violence, challenge stereotypes and myths about rape and sexual violence, as language used in sex education classes promotes respect and empathy towards the girl-child. Language in educational resources empowers students to speak up against sexual violence, and that language used in the educational materials in their school helps foster a supportive environment for victims of sexual violence.

Research Question 2:

In what ways does media reporting on rape cases impact public perception of victims and perpetrators, particularly regarding the girl-child?

Table 2: Responses to the ways whereby media reporting on rape cases impact public perception of victims and perpetrators, particularly regarding the girl-child.

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
1	Media reports on rape cases involving the girl-child are usually sensitive and respectful towards the victims	73 (73.0)	25 (25.0)	2 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	3.29	.498
2	The language used in media reports helps to educate the public about the seriousness of sexual violence against the girl-child	36 (36.0)	56 (56.0)	8 (8.0)	0 (0.0)	3.72	.604
3	Media coverage of rape cases often avoids sensationalizing the crime and focuses on the impact on the victim	52 (52.0)	30 (30.0)	18 (18.0)	0 (0.0)	3.66	.768
4	Media reporting on rape cases of the girl-child effectively challenges common rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes	54 (54.0)	32 (32.0)	11 (11.0)	3 (3.0)	3.63	.800
5	The language used by the media in reporting rape cases promotes empathy and support for the victims	49 (49.0)	38 (38.0)	11 (11.0)	2 (2.0)	3.69	.755

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of items 1 to 5 regarding the response to the ways whereby media reporting on rape cases impact public perception of victims and perpetrators, particularly regarding the girl-child. The table shows the mean scores ranging from 3.29 – 3.72 and standard deviation values (.498 – .800). Analysis of statement reveals that (98.0%) of the respondents believed that media reports on rape cases involving the girl-child are usually sensitive and respectful towards the victims, while the remaining (2.0%) held contrary view.

It was further held that (92.0%) of the respondents indicated that the language used in media reports helps to educate the public about the seriousness of sexual violence against the girl-child, (82.0%) of the respondents noted that media coverage of rape cases often avoids sensationalizing the crime and focuses on the impact on the victim, (86.0%) of the

respondents agree that media reporting on rape cases of the girl-child effectively challenges common rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes, while (87.0%) of the entire respondent held that the language used by the media in reporting rape cases promotes empathy and support for the victims.

Table 2 shows the response to the ways whereby media reporting on rape cases impact public perception of victims and perpetrators, particularly regarding the girl-child. It was revealed that media reports on rape cases involving the girl-child are usually sensitive and respectful towards the victims, as the language used in media reports helps to educate the public about the seriousness of sexual violence against the girl-child. Media coverage of rape cases was found to often avoid sensationalizing the crime and focusing on the impact on the victim, media reporting on rape cases of the girl-child was equally found to effectively challenge common rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes, as the language used by the media in reporting rape cases promotes empathy and support for the victims.

Research Question 3:

How do policy documents and legal frameworks address the issue of rape of the girl-child, and what is the role of language in these documents?

Table 3: Responses to how policy documents and legal frameworks address the issue of rape of the girl-child, and what is the role of language in these documents.

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
1	Policy documents related to rape use clear and specific language to define sexual violence against the girl-child	70 (70.0)	20 (20.0)	6 (6.0)	4 (4.0)	2.99	.783
2	The language in legal frameworks prioritizes the protection and well-being of the girl-child who has experienced rape	40 (40.0)	42 (42.0)	17 (17.0)	1 (1.0)	2.79	.756
3	Policies and laws regarding rape are written in a way that is easy for the general public to understand	71 (71.0)	21 (21.0)	8 (8.0)	0 (0.0)	3.37	.630
4	The legal language used in rape policies helps to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions	47 (47.0)	40 (47.0)	13 (13.0)	0 (0.0)	3.66	.699
5	Policy documents and legal	49	32	12	7 (7.0)	3.77	.920

frameworks include language (49.0) (32.0) (12.0)
that supports and empowers
victims of rape, particularly
the girl-child

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of items 1 to 5 regarding the response to how policy documents and legal frameworks address the issue of rape of the girl-child, and what is the role of language in these documents. The table shows the mean scores ranging from 2.79 – 3.77 and standard deviation values (.630 – .920). Analysis of statement revealed that (90.0%) of the respondents assumed that policy documents related to rape use clear and specific language to define sexual violence against the girl-child, while the remaining (10.0%) held contrary view.

It was further held that (82.0%) of the respondents indicated that the language in legal frameworks prioritizes the protection and well-being of the girl-child who has experienced rape, (92.0%) of the respondents noted that policies and laws regarding rape are written in a way that is easy for the general public to understand, (87.0%) of the respondents agreed that the legal language used in rape policies helps to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, while (81.0%) of the entire respondents held that policy documents and legal frameworks include language that supports and empowers victims of rape, particularly the girl-child.

Table 3 shows the response to how policy documents and legal frameworks address the issue of rape of the girl-child. It was revealed that policy documents related to rape use clear and specific language to define sexual violence against the girl-child, and that the language in legal frameworks prioritizes the protection and well-being of the girl-child who has experienced rape. Policies and laws regarding rape were believed to be written in a way that is easy for the general public to understand, as the legal language used in rape policies helps to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, while policy documents and legal frameworks were believed to include language that supports and empowers victims of rape, particularly the girl-child.

Research Question 4

What are the perceptions of educators, media professionals, and policymakers regarding the impact of language on addressing rape of the girl-child?

Table 4: Responses to the perceptions of educators, media professionals, and policymakers regarding the impact of language on addressing rape of the girl-child.

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
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1	Educators believe that the language used in educational materials is crucial in shaping students' attitudes towards the girl-child and sexual violence	75 (75.0)	20 (20.0)	5 (5.0)	0 (0.0)	3.44	.383
2	Media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims	40 (40.0)	45 (45.0)	14 (14.0)	1 (1.0)	2.69	.606
3	Media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims	71 (71.0)	20 (20.0)	8 (8.0)	1 (1.0)	3.07	.730
4	Educators feel that current educational materials adequately address the importance of consent and respect for the girl-child through their language	40 (40.0)	40 (47.0)	13 (13.0)	7 (7.0)	2.96	.619
5	Media professionals acknowledge the need for guidelines to ensure that the language used in reporting does not perpetuate victim-blaming	55 (55.0)	40 (40.0)	5 (5.0)	0 (0.0)	3.17	.910

Table 4 shows the mean and standard deviation of items 1 to 5 regarding the response to the perceptions of educators, media professionals, and policymakers regarding the impact of language on addressing rape of the girl-child. The table shows the mean scores ranging from 2.69 – 3.44 and standard deviation values (.606 – .910). Analysis of statement revealed that (95.0%) of the respondents held that educators believe that the language used in educational materials is crucial in shaping students' attitudes towards the girl-child and sexual violence, while the remaining (5.0%) held contrary view.

It was further held that (85.0%) of the respondents indicated that media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims, (91.0%) of the respondents noted that policymakers agree that clear and supportive language in legal frameworks is essential for protecting the girl-child from sexual violence, (80.0%) of the respondents agree that educators feel that current educational materials adequately address the importance of consent and respect for the girl-child through their language, while (95.0%) of the entire respondents held that media

professionals acknowledge the need for guidelines to ensure that the language used in reporting does not perpetuate victim-blaming.

Table 4 shows the response to the perceptions of educators, media professionals, and policymakers regarding the impact of language on addressing rape of the girl-child. It was revealed that educators believe that the language used in educational materials is crucial in shaping students' attitudes towards the girl-child and sexual violence, as media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims. Media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims, and educators feel that current educational materials adequately address the importance of consent and respect for the girl-child through their language, while media professionals acknowledge the need for guidelines to ensure that the language used in reporting does not perpetuate victim-blaming.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine the use of language to eradicate the menace of rape of the girl-child. The findings indicate that educational materials provide clear definitions of consent and sexual violence, challenge stereotypes and myths about rape and sexual violence, as language used in sex education classes promotes respect and empathy towards the girl-child. Language in educational resources empowers students to speak up against sexual violence, and that language used in school's educational materials helps foster a supportive environment for victims of sexual violence.

It was also revealed that media reports on rape cases involving the girl-child are usually sensitive and respectful towards the victims, as the language used in media reports helps to educate the public about the seriousness of sexual violence against the girl-child. Media coverage of rape cases was found to often avoid sensationalizing the crime and focuses on the impact on the victim, media reporting on rape cases of the girl-child was equally found to effectively challenges common rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes, as the language used by the media in reporting rape cases promotes empathy and support for the victims.

Furthermore, it was revealed that policy documents related to rape use clear and specific language to define sexual violence against the girl-child, and that the language in legal frameworks prioritizes the protection and well-being of the girl-child who has experienced rape. Policies and laws regarding rape were believed to be written in a way that is easy for the general public to understand, as the legal language used in rape policies helps

to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, while policy documents and legal frameworks were believed to include language that supports and empowers victims of rape, particularly the girl-child.

Lastly, the descriptive analysis of the study revealed that educators believe that the language used in educational materials is crucial in shaping students' attitudes towards the girl-child and sexual violence, as media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims. Media professionals think that using sensitive and respectful language in reporting rape cases can significantly impact public perception of the victims, and educators feel that current educational materials adequately address the importance of consent and respect for the girl-child through their language, while media professionals acknowledge the need for guidelines to ensure that the language used in reporting does not perpetuate victim-blaming.

The findings underscore the critical role of language in shaping societal attitudes towards rape and the girl child. Empowering and inclusive language in education can foster a culture of respect and empathy, while sensitive and supportive language in media and policy can ensure victims feel safe and supported.

Conclusion

Language is a powerful tool in combating the sexual assault of underage girls and through the intentional implementation of inclusive, respectful, and empowered language in education, media, and policy, society may make substantial progress in eliminating this threat. Subsequent investigations should persist in examining and enhancing these tactics to establish a more secure and equitable global environment for every child.

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