

UNSEEN, UNHEARD: AN EXAMINATION OF NIGERIA'S RESPONSE TO MALE SEXUAL ASSAULT AND ITS HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

Nengi Anita Banigo* and Grace Chanbee Ioryevese**

Abstract

Sexual assault is an offence which has left many broken, battered, and traumatised. The law has strived in many aspects to protect victims of this offence and apprehend their respective perpetrators. However, this is not the case when the victims are male. A significant proportion of the population have been overlooked and left helpless in their pursuit of justice for the abuse they have suffered. In Nigerian society, where strength and stoicism are tied closely to masculinity, male victims have been frequently met with disbelief, stigma, or outright denial. This silence has extended into law, where the existing legal frameworks have historically struggled to recognise and respond to the realities of male sexual victimisation. The article thus, examined the legal and institutional barriers which have denied redress to these victims, sometimes deliberately, sometimes unknowingly. Despite legislative changes and procedural amendments, it was found that the Nigerian criminal law is still a long way from being all encompassing and gender-neutral in its provisions on sexual assault, especially when compared with what is attainable in other notable jurisdictions. It was also found that sexual assault is a serious breach of one's fundamental human right, hence, recognising and protecting each one irrespective of their biological sex is not only a legal necessity, but a moral imperative of the Nigerian criminal justice system. This article, therefore, recommended urgent legal review, increased public education, and strengthened institutional support to break the silence surrounding male sexual assault, as well as to ensure justice for male survivors and thoroughly punish their violators.

Keywords: Male Victims, Human Rights, Sexual Assault, Criminal Justice, Violence.

1.0 Introduction

Sexual assault, a grave violation of human rights, is an old phenomenon that has ravaged societies and institutions for decades but has not yet been fully comprehended as a problem affecting both genders in society.

1

This is arguably because it is majorly perceived as a tool used by men to exhibit dominance over women,² with concentration mostly placed on males exclusively as perpetrators and females exclusively as victims.³ As a result, in contemporary society, the sexual abuse of males is massively denied, misunderstood and trivialised,⁴ consequently contributing to the numerous challenges male victims of sexual assault often face, including societal stigma, legal neglect, and institutional silence. This article, therefore, begins by tracing the historical development of sexual abuse norms, drawing from Ancient Greek and Roman Mythologies, colonial influence on sexual assault laws in Nigeria, and conflict and post-conflict attitudes in the treatment of male victims.

The article then proceeds to examine male sexual assault as a breach of fundamental human rights under Nigerian law, such as, the rights to health, dignity, equality, liberty, and privacy; and goes further to critically analyse the effectiveness of existing legal protections for male victims of sexual assault, as well as the roles and limitations of primary institutional bodies in responding to such cases. Finally, the article undertakes a comparative analysis of legal responses to male sexual assault in other jurisdictions; specifically in South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and

* LLB, B.L, LLM, Lecturer, Faculty of Law, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Email: nengi.banigo@uniport.edu.ng Phone: +2348035418884

** LLB, Department of Commercial and Industrial Law, Faculty of Law, University of Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria. Email: gracechanbee@gmail.com or +2348168339078

¹ K N Anugwom, 'How do I tell the Story?: Explaining Sexual Harassment and Victimisation among Male Students in Nigerian Universities' *Brazilian Journal of Science* [2024] (3) (4) 24.

² Ibid

³ CM Bullock and M Beckson, 'Male Victims of Sexual Assault: Phenomenology, Psychology, Physiology' *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* [2011] (39) (2) 200.

⁴ J Spiegel, *Sexual Abuse of Males: The SAM Model of Theory and Practice* (Taylor & Francis Books Inc., 2012) vii.

Canada, for the purpose of identifying best practices and potential reforms for the Nigerian legal system.

2.0 Historical Foundation

Historically, the Romans, Greeks, Persians and Iranians, among others, used male sexual assault as a punitive measure for men.⁵ During those times, the act was used to render a man powerless.⁶ However, in these societies, the concept of sexual assault, particularly against males, was virtually absent from legal discourse, and where it did exist, it was often framed in terms of dishonour rather than personal violation.⁷

Roman law, for instance, treated male sexual assault primarily as an offence against the dignity of a free male citizen rather than a sexual crime *per se*.⁸ A Roman gentleman raised no eyebrows if a man took a pederastic interest in a slave, prostitute, or freedman, but seducing the son of a fellow citizen was a grave insult, comparable to adultery, because it deprived the young man of his future claim to unimpeachable masculinity.⁹

Medieval European legal traditions, including Canon Law, focused primarily on female chastity, ignoring male sexual victimisation.¹⁰ Male rape, when acknowledged at all, was often conflated with the crime of sodomy and viewed through a lens of moral deviance rather than as a violent assault.¹¹

This omission was codified into various legal systems that disseminated across the globe through colonialism. Prior to the advent of the British, the offence of sexual assault was framed as a classic example of a gender-oriented crime in Nigeria, in that it could only be

⁵ DJ Porche, 'Male Sexual Assault: History, Description, Epidemiology, and Clinical Presentation' *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners* [2005] (1)(4) 196.

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Porche, (n 5)

⁸ CA Williams, 'Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity' *The American Historical Review* [2001] (106) (1) 236.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ J Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (The University of Chicago Press, 1980) 119-167.

¹¹ *ibid*

committed by a male upon a female, shaped by rigid societal perceptions about masculinity and femininity.¹²

While many Nigerian cultures aimed largely to train men to be domineering, ruthless, and in control, and to see themselves as naturally superior to women, females were seen as being easily ruled or controlled and naturally inferior to men.¹³ Thus, the law was primarily interested in upholding the virtue of women and protecting the female body from the ‘male’s property’.¹⁴

Illicit sexual offences were largely considered private family matters, with cultural mechanisms put in place to punish the offender and restore the honour of the victim’s family.¹⁵ These responses varied across ethnic groups but generally reflected a communal, rather than individual, approach to justice.¹⁶ However, there are no recorded accounts of protections for male victims, or any indication that society acknowledged the possibility that men, too, could suffer unspeakable forms of sexual abuse.

During the colonial era, there was the introduction of British laws and traditions, which generally protected female victims of sexual assault and seldomly recognised male victims. This significantly shaped Nigerian criminal law, as despite gaining independence in 1960, the country’s laws largely reflect colonial influences due to Section 32(1) of the Interpretation Act, which allows the continued application of English common law, equity, and statutes of general application which were in force in England on January 1, 1900, within federal legislative matters in Nigeria.¹⁷

It becomes imperative here to refer to the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, an Act of the UK parliament, that prescribes severe punishments for persons who attempt to or

¹² I E Okagbue, *The Reform of Sexual Offences in Nigerian Criminal Law* (NIALS Press, 2007) 4.

¹³ CO Izugbara, Patriarchal Ideology and Discourse of Sexuality in Nigeria (A paper presented at the Understanding Human Sexuality Series 2, Lagos, Nigeria, on 2 December, 2004).

¹⁴ Okagbue, (n 12)

¹⁵ VN Enebeli and A. P. Lilly-Tariah, ‘Redefining Rape in Nigeria: Lessons from the United Kingdom’ *Rivers State University Journal of Public Law* [2024] (12)(1) 143.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ IA Cap 123, LFN 2004, s 32(1).

unlawfully and carnally know any girl or woman; with no prescribed punishment for perpetrators of male sexual assault.¹⁸

The Criminal Code Act, governing southern Nigeria was built on statutes such as the aforementioned UK Act, and accordingly reflects the same gendered perspective on the offence of sexual assault, particularly in its Section 357.¹⁹ Similarly, the Penal Code, which is applicable in the northern region, also mirrors the gender-biased language in terms of sexual offences of the Indian Penal Code of 1860, upon which it was modelled.

Notably, the mid-20th century brought further complications, particularly during and after major wars. Reports from World War II (1939-1945) and subsequent conflicts, such as the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971), have documented the sexual assault of male prisoners of war, often as a form of torture, used to humiliate, dominate and instil fear in victims.²⁰

In Africa, during civil wars and under military regimes, including the Biafran War in Nigeria (1967–1970), rape and other forms of sexual violence were perpetrated both by government forces and those who had initiated the conflict.²¹ On the part of the Nigerian government, sexual violence was used as a tool of intimidation in response to the secessionist demand for an independent Biafra. It also served as a form of torture and punishment against individuals whose political views aligned with the secessionist cause.²²

Conversely, forces on the Biafran side also employed sexual violence as a weapon, targeting ethnic communities that did not support the war effort and branding them as

¹⁸ Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, s 5.

¹⁹ Criminal Code Act, s 357.

²⁰ A Ngari, 'Male Victims of Sexual Violence' *African Identities* [2016] <<https://thisisafrica.me/african-identities/male-victims-sexual-violence-wars-silent-sufferers/?amp=1>> accessed 15 May, 2025.

²¹ AD Ikuomola, 'The Nigerian Civil War of 1967 and the Stigmatisation of Children Born of Rape Victims in Edo State' in R. Branche and F. Virgili (eds), *Rape in Wartime* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) 169-183.

²² S Makhathini, 'Truth Seeking and Sexual Violence: Nigeria Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission' *African Transitional Justice Hub* [2023] <<https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/nigeria-human-rights-violations-investigation-commission-1999-2002/>> accessed 15 May, 2025.

saboteurs.²³ Sexual violence during this period manifested in various brutal forms, including mass gang rapes and the forced sterilisation of Igbo men during the Biafran War, yet this history remains under-explored and largely undocumented.²⁴

As Zainab Hawa Bangura, the former United Nations Secretary-General's special representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, pointed out: 'The crippling repercussions of rape in war are devastating for women, but our sons and brothers who are victims also suffer in silence'.²⁵

It was not until the late 20th century that scholars and activists began to seriously consider male sexual assault as a legitimate form of victimisation.²⁶ The rise of feminist movements in the 1970s and 80s helped to expand the understanding of sexual violence, although early feminist discourse largely centred on female victims which were not taken seriously until the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict in 1992.²⁷

During this same period, awareness began to grow regarding sexual violence in male-only institutions such as prisons and the military.²⁸ In Nigeria, accounts of sexual abuse on men in correctional facilities and among displaced persons have increasingly surfaced, with survivors often facing ridicule, disbelief, or legal hurdles in seeking justice.²⁹

Legal reforms have since begun to reflect these changing understandings. For instance, the UK Sexual Offences Act of 2003 provides for both male and female victims in defining sexual assault by not restricting the victim to a particular gender.³⁰ Similarly, in the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) redefined rape in 2013 to encompass victims and perpetrators of any gender, deviating from nearly a century of gender-specific definitions. In South Africa, one of the pioneering African nations to

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Ngari, (n 20)

²⁶ M Vermeulen, 'Hidden Victims: The Story of Sexual Violence against Men in Armed Conflict' *E-International Relations* [2011] <<https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/13572>> accessed 15 May, 2025.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ J Alagbe, 'Victims Share Agonising Tales of Sexual Assault by Fellow Male Inmates' (*The Punch* Lagos, 14 May 2016)18-19.

³⁰ Sexual Offences Act 2003, s 3.

enact gender-neutral sexual assault legislation in 2007, male sexual assault has progressively gained prominence in both legal and public discourse.

In recognition of the limitations inherent in its existing legal frameworks, Nigeria enacted the VAPP Act in 2015. This Act represented a substantial transformation by redefining the crime of rape in gender-neutral terms and emphasising the nature of the act rather than the gender of the individuals involved. Furthermore, it expanded the scope of sexual offences to encompass sexual harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, and other related offences.

3.0 Male Sexual Assault as a Breach of Fundamental Human Rights under Nigerian Law

Fundamental human rights are simply the rights a person has because he is a human being.³¹ The court, in *Asemota v Yesufu*,³² held that ‘fundamental human right is an undoubted inalienable right, which corresponds to a ‘jus naturale’. It is the greatest right, and when it is contained in the constitution of a nation, it enshrines a people’s expression of political and civic or civil rights as endowed by nature’. It can be perceived as a right which stands above the ordinary laws of the land and which in fact is antecedent to the political society itself.³³

Sexual assault is one of the most grievous forms of human rights violation that can be committed against any person. It constitutes an infringement of human rights including a victim’s right to health, dignity, freedom from torture, liberty, and privacy, among others. I. T. Muhammad, JSC, in *Magaji v Nigerian Army*,³⁴ condemned the accused, holding the perverse act of sexual abuse against two underaged boys, a crime against the order of nature; an offence that defies the laws of all human beings which is against God and the state.

³¹ J Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (Cornell University Press, 2003)10.

³² [1982] 3 NCLR. 419

³³ *Ransome Kuti v AG Federation* [1985] 2 NWLR (Pt. 6) 211.

³⁴ [2012] 16 NWLR (Pt. 1326)318.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provides that rape and other forms of sexual crimes are crimes against humanity itself.³⁵ Following this, the International Criminal Court, in *The Prosecutor v Akayesu*,³⁶ issued a life sentence to the accused charged with this offence.

From the foregoing, there is no doubt that male sexual assault in Nigeria constitutes a clear violation of numerous fundamental human rights recognised both constitutionally and under international human rights instruments, as shall be discussed below.

3.1 Right to Health

Male sexual assault has become a significant public health problem, with dire consequences for victims, families and communities globally.³⁷ It has perverse physical, psychological, emotional and mental health implications on the victim that affects their wellbeing and quality of life.³⁸

Although not recognised as a fundamental right which can be justifiable and enforced by individuals upon its breach unless under rigid circumstances, section 17(3)(d) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) provides that the state shall provide adequate medical and health facilities for all persons.³⁹ However, by virtue of section 13 of the Child Rights Act (CRA), every child is entitled to enjoy the best attainable state of physical, mental and spiritual health.⁴⁰

International human rights instruments more broadly recognise this right, when they provide for the enjoyment by everyone, to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health under Article 16 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR),⁴¹ Article 14 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

³⁵ Rome Statute 1998, art. 7.

³⁶ Comm. No. ICTR-96-4-T, ICL 129 (ICTR 1998)

³⁷ SE Mgozeli and S. E. Duma, 'An Exploration of the Consequences of Rape Victimisation for Men' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies of Health and Wellbeing* [2025] (20)1.

³⁸ MD Donne, *et al*, 'Barriers to and Facilitators of Help-Seeking Behaviour Among Men who Experience Sexual Violence' *American Journal of Men's Health* [2017] (12)(2) 189-201.

³⁹ CFRN 1999, Cap C23, LFN 2004, s 17(3)(d)

⁴⁰ CRA 2003, s 13

⁴¹ ACHPR 1981, art. 16

(ACRWC),⁴² and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 (UDHR),⁴³ among others.

Male victims of sexual violence are more likely to come down with mental or psychological health challenges down the line, including post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, body image perception issues, personality disorder, low self-esteem, anxiety disorders, depression, and suicide; than non-victims of violence.⁴⁴

A study showed how this kind of experience could lead to anal lacerations, causing unbearable pain which may make it difficult for victims to walk or even defecate.⁴⁵ It has also been reported that male sexual assault could lead to the contraction of sexually transmissible diseases, including HIV, hepatitis A and B, syphilis and gonorrhoea, especially when prevention methods are non-existent because the victim could not have reasonably expected the attack, or did not have the resources to do so.⁴⁶

Conclusively, it is very apparent that in most instances of male sexual assault, the right to health is severely compromised, as it leads to immediate physical harm and can trigger long-lasting psychological consequences, which hinders the victim's ability to fully recover and may not be adequately addressed by the substandard healthcare facilities in Nigeria.

Moreover, due to the limited recognition of this right under the Nigerian legislation, it will be difficult for an affected victim to institute or pursue an action on the ground that the assault committed against him impacted his health negatively.

⁴² ACRWC 1990, art. 14

⁴³ UDHR 1948, art. 3

⁴⁴ CJ Ngini, *et al* 'Knowledge, Attitude, and Prevalence of Sexual Violence Among Male Undergraduate Students in a Tertiary Institution in Lagos, Nigeria' *American Journal of Men's Health* [2025] (19)(3) 2.

⁴⁵ D J Porche (n. 5) 5.

⁴⁶ L Stemple, 'Male Rape and Human Rights' *Hastings Journal* [2009] (60)(3)609.

3.2 Right to Dignity and Freedom from Torture

The dignity of a human person is like a fabric that shields the societal value system from interpolation.⁴⁷ Invariably, sexual assault has become a tool of degradation, torture, and character assassination, which can debase human society into the animal kingdom.⁴⁸ All forms of sexual abuse are the epitome of torture, inhumane treatment, and servitude, in that they reduce victims to a tool of sexual gratification.⁴⁹

Section 34 of the 1999 CFRN provides for the fundamental right of a citizen's dignity, and guarantees freedom from torture, inhuman, cruel or degrading treatment.⁵⁰ Section 11 of the CRA protects more specifically, a child's right to dignity.⁵¹ In the same vein, regional and international instruments ratified by Nigeria generally recognise and protect this right. Article 1 and 5 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) protects the right to dignity and freedom from torture,⁵² as well as Article 5 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR).⁵³

In the case of *E. B. v Romania*,⁵⁴ the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the act of rape, the most common form of sexual assault, constituted a violation of the right to dignity and freedom from inhuman or degrading treatment. Similarly, the Supreme Court of South Africa, in *S v Chapman*,⁵⁵ described it as 'a humiliating, degrading and brutal invasion of the privacy, dignity and the person of the victim'. Considering the above, it is safe to conclude without hesitation that sexual violence robs people of their right to human dignity and, by extension, is a bottleneck in the wheel of enjoying their statutorily guaranteed fundamental human rights.⁵⁶

⁴⁷ A Follesdal and T Pogge, *Real World Justice: Grounds, Principles, Human Rights and Social Institutions* (Springer Publishing, 2005) 229-293.

⁴⁸ M Mustapha, 'Rape as a Violation of Fundamental Human Rights: A Peculiarity of Developing Nations' *Redeemer's University of Nigeria Journal of Jurisprudence and International Law* [2022] (1) 80.

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ CFRN 1999, s 34

⁵¹ CRA 2003, s 11

⁵² UDHR 1948, arts. 1&5.

⁵³ ACHPR 1981, art. 5

⁵⁴ App. No. 49089/10, (19/03/2019)

⁵⁵ [1997] ZAZSCA 45

⁵⁶ Mustapha, (n 48) 81

3.3 Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination

The right to be free from discrimination is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution and in several international human rights treaties, and like other rights of great consequence, it is held to be non-derogable.⁵⁷ This means that it must be always regarded and cannot be suspended or revoked under any circumstance.

The 1999 CFRN prohibits discrimination on any ground and guarantees the equality of all citizens, when it explicitly states in its Section 42, that no citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or restriction, or be accorded any privilege or advantage, based on their community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion, or political opinion.⁵⁸

At the international level, the UDHR acknowledges that all human beings are born free and are equally entitled to all rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.⁵⁹ Likewise, by virtue of Article 3 of the ACHPR, every individual shall be equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law.⁶⁰

Due to the fact that the international human rights system is apparently one in which principles of non-discrimination are paramount, state parties are mandated to ensure the equal rights of men and women in the enjoyment of their civil and political rights, without discrimination on the basis of sex, inter alia, under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),⁶¹ which Nigeria is a signatory to.

In pursuance of this mandate, the Human Rights Committee, in the case of *Fulmati Nyaya v Nepal*,⁶² found that the state of Nepal had violated several human rights enshrined in the ICCPR, including the victim's right not to be subjected to gender discrimination.

⁵⁷ Follesdal and Pogge, (n46) 638

⁵⁸ CFRN 1999, s 42

⁵⁹ UDHR 1948, arts. 1&2

⁶⁰ ACHPR 1981, art. 3

⁶¹ ICCPR 1966, art. 3

⁶² Comm. No. CCPR/C/125/D/2556/2015

Nigerian legal frameworks fall considerably short in extending its protection of victims of sexual abuse to male survivors. It can therefore be asserted that excluding one sex from this protection breaches the right to equality and freedom from discrimination: an unacceptable derogation from its absolute nature.

3.4 Right to Privacy

The concept of privacy embodies the moral fact that a person belongs to himself and not others, nor to society.⁶³ Brandis J., in the American case of *Olmstead v United States*, defined privacy as ‘the right to be let alone-the most comprehensive of rights and the right most valued by civilised men’.⁶⁴

The law seeks to protect the personality of an individual because he is a human being, and the self-worth of his person.⁶⁵ As a result, every unjustifiable intrusion by anybody or even the government itself upon the privacy of an individual is deemed to be a violation of this right.

Section 37 of the 1999 Constitution provides thus: ‘the privacy of citizens, their homes, correspondence, telephone conversations and telegraphic communications is hereby guaranteed and protected’.⁶⁶ This right is also preserved for children under Section 8 of the CRA.⁶⁷ In a similar fashion, the UDHR provides that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation.⁶⁸ Accordingly, every person is entitled to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Male sexual assault embodies a wide range of sexual behaviours performed against a victim contrary to his will. It involves the unauthorised access or invasion into a person’s body and removes their right to control their sexual and personal interactions.

⁶³ *Thornburgh v American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists* 106 U. S. 2169, 2187 (1986)

⁶⁴ 277 U. S. 438 (1928)

⁶⁵ ES Nwauche, ‘The Right to Privacy in Nigeria’ *CALS Review of Nigerian Law and Practice* [2007] (1) 65

⁶⁶ CFRN 1999, s 37

⁶⁷ CRA 2003, s 8

⁶⁸ UDHR 1948, art. 12

Consequently, one can reasonably conclude that male sexual assault strips away the right of the male victim to privacy and contravenes the provisions of the law which safeguard this right.

4.0 Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Laws Protecting Male Victims of Sexual Assault in Nigeria

The previous section addressed how sexual assault against men can encroach upon their fundamental human rights. It therefore becomes critical to ask: How effective is Nigerian criminal legislation in protecting these rights when violated through acts of sexual assault?

The Nigerian Criminal Code Act defines rape in subjective terms, when it provides that a person is said to have committed the offence of rape if he has unlawful sexual relations with a girl or woman without her knowledge or consent.⁶⁹ This has received judicial backing, as seen in the case of *Akpan v State*,⁷⁰ where the court held that 'rape is the unlawful carnal knowledge of a girl or woman without her consent'.

This definition is deeply problematic. It exclusively recognises male perpetrators and female victims, thereby excluding male victims from legal recognition under the offence of rape. In essence, men are only portrayed as potential offenders. The Act goes further to prescribe the punishment for rape as life imprisonment.⁷¹ However, since the definition of rape itself does not extend to male victims, they are effectively excluded from the protections of this provision, and their assailants cannot be prosecuted for rape under this section.

Section 353 of the Criminal Code Act CCA attempts to acknowledge male victims through its prohibition of "unlawful and indecent assault" on males. However, the language and punishment betray the gravity of such violations. The section classifies male sexual assault as merely indecent, punishable by just three years' imprisonment

⁶⁹ CCA, s 357

⁷⁰ [2014] LPELR-22740 (CA).

⁷¹ CCA, s 358

which is a gross underestimation of the harm suffered. Moreover, it fails to define what constitutes ‘unlawful’ or ‘indecent’, leaving the provision vague and open to subjective interpretation.

Section 353 attempts to acknowledge male victims through its prohibition of unlawful and indecent assault on males.⁷² This section significantly underestimates the severity of male sexual assault by classifying it as ‘indecent assault’, punishable by a mere imprisonment term of three years, which grossly underestimates the gravity of male sexual assault. Moreover, it fails to define what constitutes ‘unlawful’ and ‘indecent assault’ on males, leaving the provision vague and open to multiple interpretations.

Accordingly, Section 282 of the Penal Code (PC),⁷³ applicable in the Northern part of Nigeria, also defines rape strictly in terms of male-on-female violence. The Act only extends its protection to male victims of abuse when it penalises acts of gross indecency upon the person of another without his consent.⁷⁴

Yet again, there is no clarity whatsoever on what constitutes ‘gross indecency’. In addition, the punishment for this offence is imprisonment for a term which may extend up to seven years along with the payment of a fine, which is relatively lenient in comparison to the provision on rape where the offender could serve his sentence for life.

To address these gaps, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), enacted in 2015, introduced a more inclusive approach. It provides that the offence of rape is committed if a person intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person with any part of his or her body or anything else, and the other person does not consent to the penetration.⁷⁵ This gender-neutral language marks a significant departure from older laws and is commendable.

The VAPP Act also recognises sexual assault, unlike the CCA and PC, and regards it as the intentional and unlawful touching, striking or causing of bodily harm to an individual

⁷² CCA, s 353

⁷³ PC Cap P3 1960, s 282.

⁷⁴ PC 1960, s 285.

⁷⁵ VAPP Act, Cap A 2 2015, s 1.

in a sexual manner without his or her consent.⁷⁶ The Act also recommends the award of appropriate compensation to the victim by the court and the registration of the criminal in the sex offenders' list,⁷⁷ both of which are absent in the CCA and PC.

However, the Act is not without shortcomings. Firstly, it does not acknowledge that a man's penis can also be forcefully penetrated, thus failing to provide justice to victims of such abuse.

Secondly, its applicability is limited to only states which domesticate the Act. Although passed by the National Assembly, Section 47 of the Act restricts its applicability to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja,⁷⁸ and Section 27 grants jurisdiction over crimes defined by the Act exclusively to the High Court of the FCT.⁷⁹

While some states have adopted it, others are yet to do so, while some others opted to enact a similar legislation rather than domesticate it. It can thus be rightfully said that this Act has yet to achieve nationwide recognition, and this raises serious concerns for the male victims in states where the Act has not been domesticated.

Finally, there is a lack of judicial precedents abiding by the provisions of this Act, as there are no publicly reported or documented Nigerian court cases where the VAPP Act has been applied specifically to prosecute sexual assault against male victims.

A striking example is the 2016 case of *Darlington v Lagos state*,⁸⁰ which involves the repeated sexual abuse of male minors by a football coach. The state failed to prosecute the offender under rape charges. Instead, charges were brought under provisions related to sodomy, a categorisation that not only diminished the gravity of the offence but also failed to reflect the full extent of the harm inflicted on the victims.

⁷⁶ VAPP Act, s 46.

⁷⁷ VAPP, (n 75)

⁷⁸ VAPP Act, s 47

⁷⁹ VAPP Act, s 27

⁸⁰ [Unreported] <<https://www.educatedus.com/male-rape-in-nigerian-law-legal-gaps-and-the-need-for-reform/>> accessed 14 July, 2025.

Another legislation which is instrumental in the protection of victims of sexual assault, male and female inclusive, is the Child's Right Act (CRA), 2003. The Act defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years,⁸¹ and strongly prohibits sexual intercourse with a child; the contravention of which will condemn the offender to a life imprisonment sentence.⁸²

The Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015, also plays a critical role in the investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of sexual offences by introducing several provisions that are particularly relevant to sexual assault cases, without restrictions on gender. For instance, Section 232 of the ACJA permits the conduct of private proceedings where the charge involves sexual offences, thereby protecting the identity and dignity of victims.⁸³ This is especially important for male victims, who often face intense shame, ridicule or disbelief when reporting such crimes. By guaranteeing privacy in court, the Act encourages reporting and reduces the secondary trauma of public exposure.

However, just like the VAPP Act, the CRA and ACJA are federal laws, and as such, their applicability is primarily limited to the Federal Capital Territory unless domesticated by individual states, and their provisions cannot be invoked in states that are yet to adopt them.

Considering the above, it can be unequivocally asserted that there is an absence of effective laws to address male sexual violence in Nigeria which presents significant socio-legal challenges for male victims, echoing Touquet's argument that 'masculinist bias' prevents legal systems from including discourses that consider the sexual victimisation of men and boys.⁸⁴

Despite being a signatory to numerous international treaties and conventions, including the ICCPR, UDHR, Rome Statute, and regional instruments like the ACHPR and

⁸¹ CRA 2003, s 277

⁸² CRA 2003, s 31

⁸³ ACJA 2015, s 232.

⁸⁴ ET Njoku and I Dery, 'Gendering Counter-Terrorism: Kunya and the Silencing of Male Victims of CRSV in Northeastern Nigeria' *African Studies Review* [2023] (66) (4)962.

ACRWC, Nigeria has not harmonised its domestic legal regime with its international obligations. The Rome Statute, domesticated in 2004, clearly defines sexual violence as a crime against humanity without reference to gender,⁸⁵ yet this principle has not been meaningfully operationalised within the domestic criminal justice framework. Nigeria's continued failure to revise its rape laws to reflect these standards is a clear indication of the gap between its treaty commitments and its domestic practices.

In addition, public and legal discourse in Nigeria often sidelines male victims. Pervasive myths such as, 'only women can be raped' reinforce legal inequalities, that not only deny justice but violate core legal principles, including the maxim, '*ubi jus ibi remedium*' (where there is a right, there is a remedy), as male victims are frequently denied legal remedies since there are no laws providing for them in the first place.⁸⁶ This contravenes both national legal principles and international standards, such as Article 26 of the ICCPR,⁸⁷ which guarantees equal protection of the law, and Article 8 of the UDHR, which ensures the right to an effective remedy.⁸⁸

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in *MIDH v Côte d'Ivoire*,⁸⁹ held that a state's failure to protect rights even when violated by private actors, constitutes a breach attributable to the state. Similarly, in *M. C. v Bulgaria*,⁹⁰ the European Court of Human Rights affirmed that states have a positive obligation to enact and enforce laws that sufficiently punish sexual crimes.

Relying on the above decisions, it is evident that the existing legislation in Nigeria is highly inadequate when it comes to the protection of male victims, and the state's inability to safeguard the rights of these victims have allowed violations against them to persist. Despite the array of laws that exist on paper, their effectiveness in protecting male victims remains critically undermined by outdated definitions, fragmented implementation, and systemic neglect.

⁸⁵ Rome Statute 1998, s7

⁸⁶ Njoku and Dery, (n 84) 960

⁸⁷ ICCPR 1966, art. 26

⁸⁸ UDHR 1948, art. 8

⁸⁹ Comm. No. 262/2002 (ACHPR 2008)

⁹⁰ App. No. 39272/98 (ECHR 2003)

5.0 Evaluating the Roles and Limitations of Institutional Bodies in Addressing Sexual Assault against Males

There are several institutional mechanisms in Nigeria, among which are the Nigeria Police Force, the Judiciary and Courts, the National Human Rights Commission, and several non-governmental organisations; all tasked with several responsibilities, including the protection of human rights and helping victims of sexual assault seek redress for the violation of their rights.

The Nigeria Police Force plays an important role in the sustenance of law and order, and in the security of lives and property.⁹¹ In carrying out this central objective, the police bear primary responsibility for receiving complaints of sexual assault, preserving evidence, and initiating investigations. However, despite the seriousness of the act of sexual violence and its devastating consequences on victims, it is surprising that 50 to 90 percent of such incidents are unreported.⁹²

While extensive studies have identified the influence of social perception and victims' self-blame as factors responsible for the underreporting of male sexual abuse, fewer studies have explored victims' interaction with police officers and possible impacts this could have on victims' reporting behaviour.⁹³

The Police often demonstrate insensitivity to the plight of victims when they lodge complaints.⁹⁴ They subject them to ridiculous questions such as 'did you enjoy it?' or other unimaginable questions, while laughing and jesting as the victim recounts the harrowing experience, thereby trivialising this very sensitive matter.⁹⁵ Recent media accounts of the experiences of sexual assault victims and their families with the police,

⁹¹ OS Agbefe, *et al*, 'The Impact and Challenges of the Nigeria Police Force in the Maintenance of Internal Security in Nigeria' *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* [2023] (11)(2) 30.

⁹² TG Obagboye, 'Low Reporting of Rape Cases in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects' *African Journal of Law and Human Rights* [2019] (3)(2) 68.

⁹³ RA Aborisade, 'On the Darkness of Dark Figures of Sexual Crimes: Survivors' Rape Reporting Experiences with the Nigerian Police' *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* [2025] (73)

<<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1756061623000022>> accessed 14 July 2025.

⁹⁴ Obagboye, (n 92) 75

⁹⁵ *ibid*.

have also reported cases of exploitation, demand for a bribe, secondary victimisation, and prejudice on the part of law enforcement officers.⁹⁶

These challenges are compounded by the existence of some legal rules and procedures including the Court Rules, which have become so complex that they tend to obstruct access to justice rather than grant access to justice, which is an integral part of the judiciary's duty in interpreting the law made by the legislature.⁹⁷

An example of this complexity can be seen in the provision of Order 44(4) of the Rivers State High Court (Civil Procedure) Rules 2010.⁹⁸ This provision is also codified in the Court Rules of other states, and it provides that the Judge can at any time extend or adjourn the time for doing any act or for taking any proceedings, provided that the defaulting party pays a penalty. Now, parties have utilised this order to perpetuate delays and harshness to the system.⁹⁹ They make applications every now and then to gag the other party and then pay penalties that are usually nominal in nature.¹⁰⁰ Most victims, when faced with unnecessary protracted trials, in addition to the high costs of litigation, end up abandoning their rights just to stay out of Court and avoid reliving their trauma all over again.¹⁰¹

Another shortcoming of the judiciary in addressing cases of male sexual assault and ensuring justice for victims is the frequent dismissal of cases due to insufficient evidence, often stemming from the requirement of corroboration. Although the Supreme Court, in *Iko v. State*,¹⁰² held that a conviction can be sustained in the absence of corroborative evidence, it cautioned that relying solely on uncorroborated testimony is unsafe. As a result, courts often hesitate to convict offenders in cases where the victim's account

⁹⁶ Aborisade, (n 93)

⁹⁷ M Izzi and ON Adiola, 'Judicial Approach to Gender-based Violence in Nigeria: An Evaluation' *International Journal of Civil Law and Legal Research* [2021] (1)(2) 34.

⁹⁸ RHC Rules 2010, order 44(4)

⁹⁹ Agbefe, (n 91)

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

¹⁰² [2001] 14 NWLR (Pt. 732) 221

stands alone, contributing to a persistently low conviction rate and undermining efforts to hold perpetrators accountable.

It is also worth noting that many courts have considered male sexual assault an impossibility where the accused is a woman, relying largely upon stereotypical notions that such offence constitutes a man (the actor) penetrating a woman (the object).¹⁰³ This argument appears to assume that a male would have to achieve an erection before a female could sexually violate him.¹⁰⁴

In *Willan v Willan*,¹⁰⁵ the wife who frequently demanded sexual intercourse from her husband would indulge in violence to coerce him when he did not wish to oblige. In denying the husband's appeal, the English Court of Appeal, in referencing the husband's erect penis, reasoned that the actual act of intercourse constituted the evidence of condonation. It further noted that it might be otherwise in the case of a wife, but in the case of a husband who has sexual intercourse, it can only be said of him that what he does, he does on purpose, and that sexual intercourse with his wife must be a voluntary act on his part.

Beyond the criminal justice system, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) holds quasi-judicial powers and a mandate to investigate human rights violations, determine compensation for victims, and recommend reforms to the appropriate authorities.¹⁰⁶ The NHRC has powers to institute actions in court in the interest of the public, and can also refer human rights violations requiring criminal prosecution to the Attorney General of the Federation or States as the case may be.¹⁰⁷

However, cases involving these violations such as sexual assault, take a long time to resolve in court, and this can lead to extended suffering and injustice for victims, as well

¹⁰³ SF Fuchs, 'Male Sexual Assault: Issues of Arousal and Consent' *Cleveland State Law Review* [2004] (51)(1) 113

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ 2 All E. R. 463, 463 (Ca. 1960)

¹⁰⁶ NHRC Act 1995, s5

¹⁰⁷ AL Ibrahim, *et al*, 'Repositioning the NHRC for Advancing the Promotion, Protection, and Enforcement of Human Rights and the Attainment of Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria' *Journal of Political Discourse* [2023] (1)(4) 83.

as a sense of impunity for perpetrators.¹⁰⁸ Delayed justice undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the NHRC, and citizens may lose faith in the ability of the Commission to secure justice.¹⁰⁹ Also, many Nigerians are not aware of their rights and the role of the NHRC in addressing breaches of these rights as the activities of the Commission are largely urban-centred, with little effort to reach rural communities.¹¹⁰ The Commission also faces resources constraints, including limited funding, staff shortages, and insufficient infrastructure, which hinders its ability to effectively carry out its mandate to protect and promote human rights in Nigeria.¹¹¹

Finally, a vital structure in addressing sexual assault against men in Nigeria are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which have been highly instrumental in providing legal support services for victims, including structured counselling, in-depth case updates, in-person representation, and continuous guidance, ensuring survivors are well-prepared and supported in their pursuit of justice.¹¹² They also spread awareness and provide information about sexual violence to prevent it and support survivors, as well as providing emergency shelters, medical and psychosocial support to victims.¹¹³

NGOs, however, face several obstacles in the implementation of their objectives, especially in the face of delays in legal processes. This presents a barrier in addressing sexual violence cases, prolonging the trauma of survivors and resulting in frustration and despair. It has been reported that cases take months or even years to process, leaving survivors feeling demoralised and questioning the attainability of justice.¹¹⁴ Limited funding, staff shortages, and logistical constraints have also been identified as challenges that NGOs face in providing support to survivors.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid*

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ *ibid*

¹¹² SR Bolanle, *The Role of NGOs and Government Agencies in Addressing Sexual Violence Against Women in Lagos State, Nigeria* (A Research Paper Submitted to the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands, in Partial Fulfilment of the Award of Master of Arts Degree, 2024).

¹¹³ Bolanle, (n 112)

¹¹⁴ *ibid*

¹¹⁵ *ibid*

In conclusion, while state institutions and NGOs in Nigeria play essential roles in responding to sexual assault, their effectiveness in addressing the unique experiences of male victims remains limited. Institutional insensitivity, legal and procedural hurdles, lack of awareness, and resource constraints, collectively hinder access to justice and support for male survivors.

6.0 Comparative Legal Approaches to Male Sexual Assault in Nigeria

Having examined the legal, social, and institutional challenges of male sexual assault within Nigeria, this section turns to explore how some notable jurisdictions, like South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Canada have addressed similar issues. By analysing the statutory frameworks and practical approaches of these jurisdictions, this section seeks to identify practices that could inform a more inclusive and effective legal response to male sexual assault in Nigeria.

6.1 Male Sexual Assault in South Africa

South Africa arguably has the most progressive and inclusive sexual offences framework in Africa. Its pivotal legislation is the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007, which provides in Section 5, that a person is guilty of the offence of sexual assault in the event of unlawfully and intentionally sexually violating a complainant without his or her consent.¹¹⁶ This provision marked a decisive break from traditional legal definitions that excluded the male gender from protection. The law also introduced a range of offences, including compelled rape, sexual grooming, and sexually assaulting a corpse.¹¹⁷

More importantly, these legal reforms in South Africa pertaining to male abuse are not just theoretical or dormant, as they have received consistent judicial backing by the courts, which have relentlessly affirmed the rights of male victims, reinforcing the idea that all victims of sexual violence deserve equal protection and redress. For example, in

¹¹⁶ Act No. 32 of 2007, s 5.

¹¹⁷ Act No. 32 of 2007, ss 4, 6, 7, 14, 18 & 24.

the case of *S v Ncube*,¹¹⁸ a high court in South Africa convicted the defendant of repeated rape and sexual exploitation of a young boy, further demonstrating the judiciary's willingness to give full effect to the provisions of the law in protecting male victims.

Unlike in Nigeria where legal recognition of male sexual assault remains contested and enforcement is sporadic at best, South Africa's approach reflects a system where legislative intent aligns with judicial action, proving that protecting male victims is not merely aspirational, but achievable when the law is treated as more than a formality.

6.2 Male Sexual Assault in the United Kingdom

In the UK, a man could only commit sexual crimes against a woman and could not be a victim himself until the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act of 1994, which through the broadening of its definition of rape to include men,¹¹⁹ made possible the first conviction in England for the attempted rape of a man by another man in *R v Richards*.¹²⁰

The principal legislation governing sexual offences in the United Kingdom is the Sexual Offences Act, 2003. This Act recognises a number of offences, including rape, assault by penetration, sexual assault, and causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent.¹²¹ However, under this Act, the offence of rape can only be committed by a man.¹²² While other less serious offences such as assault by penetration and sexual assault are gender-neutral and may be committed by individuals of any sex, they generally carry lesser maximum sentences in comparison to rape.

In *R v Tanya Lord*,¹²³ however, the court confronted this disparity. Judge Patrick Lynch, in sentencing the female defendant to two years imprisonment for engaging in a non-

¹¹⁸ [2023] ZAGP JHC 1036

¹¹⁹ A Javaid, 'Male Rape in Law and the Courtroom' *European Journal of Current Legal Issues* [2014] (20)(2) <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273574378>> accessed 14 July, 2025.

¹²⁰ [1996] 2 Cr. App. R (S)16 7

¹²¹ Sexual Offences Act 2003, ss 1, 2, 3 & 4.

¹²² Sexual Offences Act 2003, s 1

¹²³ [Unreported] <<https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-03-10/woman-jailed-for-sex-attack-on-sleeping-man>> accessed 14 July, 2025.

consensual sexual intercourse with a man who was asleep, remarked that ‘the fact that a male is the victim does not make it any less serious than the rape of a female victim’.

Despite the judge’s acknowledgment of the seriousness of the offence, the sentence imposed could be viewed as disproportionately low, especially considering the gravity of the act to rape, which stems from its gendered definition of rape. Nigeria, by contrast, offers a more inclusive legal definition under the VAPP Act, but lacks the UK's strong procedural enforcement, which includes anonymity in the media, the use of special measures in court, and victim support services. This contrast highlights a recurring theme: legal progress is only as effective as its application.

6.3 Male Sexual Assault in the United States of America

The USA presents a diverse legal system due to its federal structure, with sexual assault laws varying across states. Under Section 2241, Title 18 of the United States Code, federal law defines aggravated sexual abuse as: ‘Engaging in a sexual act with another person by using force, or by threatening or placing that other person in fear’.¹²⁴

In the American case of *Oncale v Sundowner Offshore Services, Inc.*,¹²⁵ the Supreme Court ruled that the law does not discriminate based on the sex of the harasser or the victim in a sexual harassment suit. In 2013, the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program, also redefined rape to include male victims.

The attitude of the U.S. government in addressing the complex issue of male sexual violence is highly commendable. The country has enacted multiple gender-neutral laws and policies at both federal and state levels, including the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), to ensure protection and justice for all survivors, with no sex restrictions. Today, all 50 states have gender-neutral sexual assault laws. In contrast, Nigeria continues to face significant gaps because several states are yet to adopt the VAPP ACT, arguably the country's only comprehensive, gender-inclusive legislation on sexual violence, and even in states where it has been adopted, enforcement remains weak or non-existent.

¹²⁴ 18 U. S. Code, s 2241.

¹²⁵ 523 U. S. 75 (1998)

6.4 Male Sexual Assault in Canada

Canada offers one of the most advanced and gender-inclusive legal approaches to sexual violence. Like most jurisdictions, the state recognised solely female victims and male perpetrators in the past. However, in 1983, Bill C-127 came into force and repealed the crimes of rape, attempted rape, sexual intercourse with the feeble-minded and indecent assault, replacing them with three levels of sexual assault; all of which apply regardless of the gender involved.¹²⁶ The law also criminalises spousal sexual assault and recognises the validity of post-traumatic behaviours that may delay reporting.¹²⁷

Throughout the past three decades, Canada has witnessed dramatic changes to how the criminal justice system responds to sexual assault, through legislative reform, judicial interpretation, policy, programs and training for both criminal justice professionals, as well as professionals in health, social work and education.¹²⁸ It is now recognised that males, both as children and as adults, can be victims and survivors of sexual abuse and sexual assault.¹²⁹ The Canadian government goes as far as offering extensive victim support infrastructure, including shelters, trauma counselling, and sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs.

In the Canadian case of *R v Chase*,¹³⁰ the court held that sexual assault within the meaning of Section 246 (now Section 271) of the Criminal Code of Canada, is an assault which is committed in circumstances of a sexual nature, such that the sexual integrity of the victim is violated. This is evidently different from what is attainable in Nigerian courts, where the term, ‘sexual assault’ is not generally used, leading to the narrow use of the term, ‘rape’ which does not cover all sexual offences, and which most courts have defined as the forceful penetration of a man’s penis into a woman’s vagina, thereby excluding male victims from protection.

¹²⁶ S McDonald and A Tijerino, ‘Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Assault: Their Experiences’ *Research and Statistics Division, Department of Justice Canada* [2013] <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rr13_8/rr13_8.pdf> accessed 14 July, 2025.

¹²⁷ *ibid*

¹²⁸ *ibid*

¹²⁹ *ibid*

¹³⁰ [1987] 2 SCR 293.

7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has highlighted the reality of male sexual assault in Nigeria; a subject long buried under silence, cultural myths, and legal neglect. The existing legal instruments, particularly the Criminal and Penal Codes, retain provisions that exclude male victims from full protection of the law and are greatly unresponsive to their unique needs and experiences. Even where newer laws like the VAPP Act attempt to be inclusive, their limited applicability and narrow definitions still leave many victims outside the protective reach of the law.

Beyond legislation, the lack of domestication of fundamental laws such as the ACJA, CRA, and VAPP Act in many states, alongside the non-domestication of major international treaties, further weakens the legal foundation needed to guarantee justice and protection. Institutions that should offer support, such as the police, judiciary, and human rights bodies, are often constrained by bias, inadequate training, and poor coordination, compounding the harm already suffered by victims.

Amid these gaps, there is hope. NGOs, although under-resourced, have stepped into the space abandoned by formal institutions, offering assistance, advocacy, and visibility to male victims. In addition, the National Human Rights Commission has made commendable effort in promoting and protecting the rights of all victims of abuse, including males, despite facing limitations in enforcement powers and operational capacity. Lessons from comparative international jurisdictions have also been helpful in showing that change is possible and realisable when inclusive laws, institutional reform, and public education align toward fairness and equality.

In conclusion, this work calls for a reimagining of the Nigerian legal and institutional system. One where recognition is not restricted by sex. One where every victim is heard, protected, and empowered to seek redress without fear or shame. Until then, male sexual assault will persist, not just as a legal omission, but as a hindrance to justice and a human rights failure that we can no longer afford to ignore. Thus, the findings of this study has a

great implication on the policy makers and the relevant stakeholders in Nigeria. To this end, recommendations are made below:

- i. Amendment of the provisions on sexual offences in the Criminal and Penal Codes to ensure equal protection for all victims, regardless of gender.
- ii. Mandating states to domesticate the VAPP Act, CRA, and ACJA, and all other progressive laws including international treaties, which are widely encompassing in their protection.
- iii. Establishment of special courts dedicated to handling sexual assault cases in camera to protect male victims from stigma, ridicule, mistreatment, and retaliation.
- iv. Provision of adequate funding to human rights institutions like the NHRC to safeguard the fundamental rights of male victims.
- v. Granting statutory authority to NGOs and enabling collaboration between them and the government to facilitate better protection for male victims.
- vi. Ensuring diligent investigation of sexual violence and mandatory training for all officials involved in handling cases of sexual assault.
- vii. Promotion of widespread public enlightenment to raise awareness about the reality of male sexual abuse and its effects on victims.