

## Eradicating Sexual Assault in Nigerian University System: The Role of Investigative Journalism

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### ABSTRACT

Debates on the trends, causes, implications and appropriate measures to control sexual assault in our university system are highly speculative. This is because most literature is based on intuitive narrations. Robust study on the use of investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university education is certainly lacking. This paper x-rays the need to adopt investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university system. The theoretical framework is development media theory propounded by Dennis Mc Quail (1987). Data were secondarily sourced through newspaper publications, journal articles, text books, magazines and publications. The paper recommends the need for university administrators to strengthen and continuously support investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault and other social vices in our university system. Also, university administrators should make the elimination of sexual assault a top priority by empowering lecturers to take a stand against inappropriate name-calling and sexual comments.

**Keywords:** Eradicating, Investigative journalism, Role, Sexual assault, University system.

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, university system is established to provide desirable learning and working environments where students and lecturers can pursue their studies, work and scholarship without being intimidated. This system is expected to provide unique examples in eliminating inequalities and anomalies among all segments of the academia. Sadly, the issue related to sexual assault in Nigerian university system presents a different and grim picture. Just recently, Nseyen (2018) reported the sacking of Professor Richard Akindele by Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife for demanding sex from Monica Osagie a postgraduate student to upgrade her mark. It is amazing and disturbing that this is happening in an environment that is often believed to be a molding and filtering ground for building a virile leaders and intellectuals that will mount the stage of leadership tomorrow.

While it is well addressed in college and university campuses in most developed countries of the world through specific policies

and mechanisms of enforcement, it remains a taboo topic in African colleges and universities particularly in Nigeria (Balogun, Ahmed, Iyekolo & yorinde, 2013). According to Adamolekun (1989), sexual assault in Nigerian university system appears to be under-researched and even less reported. Accordingly, Isely and Gehrenbeck-Shim (1997) observed that sexual assault is not discriminatory to gender or status. This is because both males, females, lecturers and students are affected by it. Though, studies have shown that the number of female and students victims is far greater than male and lecturer victims. Agbonna (2008) stated that female victims are much more likely to be assaulted by an acquaintance (such as a friend or co-worker), a dating partner, an ex-boyfriend or an intimate partner than by a complete stranger. Contrarily, in a study of hospital emergency room treatments for rape, Balogun, Ahmed, Iyekolo and Ayorinde (2013) stated that the male victims as a group sustained more physical trauma, and were more likely to have been held captive longer. Ironically, the affected victims find it difficult to report the

issue to appropriate authorities because of the fear of stigmatization and victimization. Badejoko, Anyabolu, Badejoko, Ijarotimi, Kuti and Adejuyigbe (2014) observed that sexual assault is a pandemic crime that is characteristically underreported, more especially in the low income countries, because of the enduring culture of male dominance, female social and economic disempowerment and poor or non-prosecution of sex offenders (Badejoko, Anyabolu, Badejoko, Ijarotimi, Kuti&Adejuyigbe, 2014; Akinade, Adewuyi & Sulaiman, 2010).

Against the above background, Information Nigeria (2012) reported that about 2000 female students of Cross River University of Technology came out to protest over alleged sexual assault, molestation, extortion of female students by staff of the institution. They forged ahead to the Government House to register their grievance with some placards carrying inscriptions such as enough of sexual assault of female students, female molestation, e.t.c.

Expectedly, the effects of this assault on victims are so severe to the extent that they may lead to the lack of concentration on academic activities, truancy, unwanted pregnancy, decreased functionality and participation in group activities. This immoral act may make the future of the victim looks grim, ominous and unsafe (Aluedo, 2000). It is imperative to say that, until something is done to control and eradicate it, unproductive leaders will continue to rule our country; because is often say that “unless society enlighten itself with brotherly thinking and noble qualities, it will never gain harmony or unity therein. Society which lacks the blessing of noble traits is surely destined from life’s real characteristic”.

Despite the increasing scholarship attentions on sexual assault in Nigerian university system, most literatures are based on intuitive accounts. Robust studies especially on the use of investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university system is certainly lacking. This gap needs not wait further, and it imposes serious limitation to not only efforts to design and carry out a truly scientific and systematic approach to the study of sexual assault but also on policy implication.

### Conceptualizing Sexual Assault

There is no universal acceptable definition of sexual assault. In fact, definitions vary depending on the perspective from which this

type of assault is viewed (e.g., political, legal, clinical or scientific). The legal definition of the crime of sexual assault is determined by each jurisdiction (Wikipedia, 2012). Generally, sexual assault is defined as unwanted sexual contact. The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (2010) defines sexual assault as unwanted sexual contact that stops short of rape or attempted rape. This includes sexual touching and fondling. Sexual assault can be defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (Johnson, 2017).

Adeleke, Olowookere, Hassan, Komolafe, and Asekun-Olarinmoye (2016) noted that sexual assault encompasses a wide range of activities ranging from rape to physically less intrusive sexual contacts, whether attempted or completed. It involves lack of consent; the use of physical force, coercion, deception or threat; and/or the involvement of a victim that is asleep, unconscious, under aged, mentally incapacitated or physically impaired as a result of voluntary or involuntary alcohol or drug consumption (Home Office, 2004).

The National Center for Victims of Crime states (2011) noted that sexual assault takes many forms including attacks such as rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact or threats. Usually a sexual assault occurs when someone touches any part of another person's body in a sexual way, even through clothes, without that person's consent. According to Ado, Anthonia and Babagana (2010), sexual assault may include rape, forced vaginal, anal or oral penetration, forced sexual intercourse, inappropriate touching, forced kissing, child sexual abuse, or the torture of the victim in a sexual manner. It is a gender based issue and a violent crime against both the individual and the society. They further said that an estimated 300,000 women are raped and 3.7 million are confronted with unwanted sexual activity annually, the actual magnitude of female sexual assault globally is unknown because it is one of the offences not often reported.

According to Garcia-Moreno and Watts (2010), one in every five women is a victim of sexual assault and globally, 35% of women have

experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (WHO, 2013). The reported figures are said to be inaccurate and often underestimate as most cases of sexual assault are under-reported by the victims because of the associated stigma (Kullima, Kawuwa, Audu, Mairiga & Bukar, 2010). In Nigeria, Akhiwu, Umanah and Olueddo (2013) observed that only 2 of 40 cases of sexual assault are reported, attributing this amongst other reasons, to the arduous legal requirements needed to prove the cases and the associated stigma. Kullima, Kawuwa, Audu, Mairiga and Bukar(2010) noted that the reported incidence of sexual assault in Nigeria ranged from 13.8% among female students in Maiduguri to 15% among young females in Ibadan (Ajuwon, 2005). Until 2002, the management of sexual assault especially prevention was a major challenge in our setting (Akinlusi, Rabi, Olawepo, Adewunmi, Ottun & Akinola, 2016).

In summary, sexual assault occurs throughout the world, there has been little research conducted on the problem, available data suggest that in some countries nearly one in four women may experience sexual assault by an intimate partner, and up to one-third of adolescent girls report their first sexual experience as being forced. According to Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg and Zwi (2002), sexual violence acts includes but not limited to

- Putting a penis, object or other parts of the body into someone's mouth, anus or vagina.
- Being forced to give or receive oral sex - putting a penis into someone's mouth.
- Being forced to masturbate or forced to watch someone masturbate.
- Unwanted sexual touching - on private parts of the body.
- Sexual harassment - making inappropriate sexual comments.
- Voyeurism - someone exposes themselves to you.
- Making someone watch a sexual act or pornography.

### Conceptualizing Investigative Journalism

There are probably as many definitions of investigative journalism as there are journalists working in the field. One reason for this is that investigative journalism as a specialism within the profession of journalism is relatively new. Waisbord (2000) asserted that the meaning of

investigative journalism varies according to dissimilar press traditions and conditions for journalistic practice in a country. Though, there is broad agreement of its major components: systematic, in-depth, and original research and reporting, often involving the unearthing of secrets. Others note that its practice often involves heavy use of public records and computer-assisted reporting, and a focus on social justice and accountability (Kaplan, 2013).

Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) (1983), the world largest non-profit investigative journalism association, defined investigative journalism as systematic, in-depth, and original research and reporting, often involving the unearthing of secrets, heavy use of public records, and computer assisted reporting, with a focus on social justice and accountability. Weinberg (1996), defined it as reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, matters of importance to readers, viewers, or listeners. Burgh (2000) states that an investigative journalist is a man or woman whose profession is to discover the truth and to identify lapses from it in whatever media may be available.

For UNESCO(2007), Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters that are concealed—either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding. It requires using both secret and open sources and documents. Armao (2000) described investigative journalism as the literature of exposure. He noted further that it was spawned by a culture born in dissent and nurtured by laws that protect critics of government and ensure access to public proceedings and documents. Vereniging van Onderzoeks journalisten (VVOJ) (2005) defines investigative reporting simply as critical and thorough journalism.

Kaplan (2013) observed that some journalists, in fact, claim that all reporting is investigative reporting. There is some truth to this. This is because investigative techniques are used widely by beat journalists on deadline as well as by “I-team” members with weeks to work on a story. But investigative journalism is broader than this. It is a set of methodologies that are a craft, and it can take years to master. A look at stories that win top awards for investigative journalism attests to the high standards of research and reporting that the profession aspires to: in-depth inquiries that painstakingly

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track looted public funds, abuse of power, environmental degradation, health scandals, and more (Kaplan, 2013). Ettema and Glasser (1988) resolved to the idea of investigative journalism is the journalism of outrage because the results of investigative journalism often led to public betterment and has a close tie with agenda building.

### **Eradicating Sexual Assault In Nigerian University System Through Investigative Journalism**

Investigative journalism can play a crucial role in bringing allegations of sexual assault in Nigerian university system to light and eradicating the impunity in Nigeria universities. Investigative journalism is an essential—albeit untapped—source of detection in assault cases. Investigative reporting has traditionally been at the forefront of media that cause the most change and reform. Hence, it is vital to development and reformation of the university system.

Accordingly, through investigative journalism, unethical, immoral and illegal behavior by lecturers, students as well as administrative staff can be exposed. This genre of journalism has the potential to make a worthwhile contribution to society by ‘drawing attention to failures within society’s systems of regulation and to the ways in which those systems can be circumvented by the rich, the powerful and the corrupt. Investigative reports show how individual wrongs are part of a larger pattern of negligence or abuse and the systems that make these possible. They examine what went wrong and show who suffered from the mistakes. They probe not just what is criminal or illegal, but also what may be legal and overboard but nonetheless harmful.

Investigative journalists look to bring attention to violated laws, regulations or wrongdoings that they feel very strongly about. The topic of their research is completely up to their own personal interest and choosing. Their research often takes a long time to collect, and must be very thorough and involve many different sources while providing the public with important information that may have been slightly covered up.

This type of research often looks at what is not working in society and predicts trends and changes, and the analysis of the collected research is completely of the journalist him or herself, and is crucial to the public’s knowledge of very important events that are often

overlooked. Indeed, the investigative journalism serves as the mirror through which the public have a comprehensive view of activities of the university administrators, help set the agenda for the activities of the administrators, setting a platform for participation of the event of the administrators. Conclusively, for the university system to eradicate the issue of sexual assault, it needs the help of investigative journalism to enlighten the masses, shape their opinion and create a favourable disposition from such members of the public.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework for this paper is development media theory propounded by Dennis McQuail (1987). This theory canvasses media support for an existing government and its efforts to bring about socio-economic development.

It argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government, but assist them in implementing their policies. In this context, the role of investigative journalism in eradicating sexual assault in our university system can in no way be underestimated or undermined, this is largely due to the watchdog role performed by investigative journalism in shaping people’s believe and actions towards the activities of the university administrators.

These roles of investigative journalism in national development lie in their capacity and capability to teach, manipulate, sensitize and mobilize people through information dissemination (Nwabueze, 2005 ). Investigative journalism also chart a course for the public in line with the agenda setting theory, thereby creating in the minds of the people, issues that should be viewed as priority issues including development programmes and policies (Nwabueze, 2005).

### **CONCLUSION**

Nigeria has an epidemic of sexual predators preying on the most vulnerable in our university system. It is no surprise but for far too long, it is kept under wraps, because it has always been the mantra that no one should know one’s business. Contradictorily, investigative journalism possesses immense power in its hands that can help in the formation of public opinion and helps to unearth secrets, with a focus on social justice and accountability.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need to integrate investigative journalism in the fight against sexual assault in our university system.
- University administrators should make the elimination of sexual assault a top priority by empowering lecturers to take a stand against inappropriate name-calling and sexual comments.
- University administrators should strengthen and continuously support investigative journalism in the fight against sexual assault and other social vices in our university system.
- Investigative journalists should adopt highest professional standards and ethical conducts in researching editing and reporting about sexual assault and other social vices in our university system.
- Universities need to have a clear policy on sexual assault defining the meaning, the forms of assault and the penalties and once this is done, it must be publicized so that the students know what sexual assault means and lecturers also know the components of sexual assault and the penalties.
- It is also necessary to educate students to know the difference between friendly teasing and bullying.
- Speaking out and taking punitive action against perpetrators of sexual assault should be encouraged.
- The culture of silence should be discouraged and there must be mechanism in place for the complaints to be listened to and appropriate steps must be taken.
- University administrators should, as a matter of necessity, set up independent panels to which victims of sexual assault may report incidences of such assault.
- University administrators should establish whistle-blower policies that should involve protection of the victim who comes forward to expose incidents of assault.
- Students should be discouraged from approaching lecturers to solicit grades before or after tests or examinations.
- The university system needs to step up the code of conduct for staff and form of

transactional relationship between students and lecturers.

- Finally, there is need for every university to open a sexual assault register among other punitive measures for offenders.

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**Citation:** EGBEGI, Friday Raphael, Benjamin Okorieajah, Onyejebu Dominic Chukwuemeka "Eradicating Sexual Assault in Nigerian University System: The Role of Investigative Journalism", *Annals of Journalism and Mass Communication*, vol.1, no.1, pp. 1-6., 2019.

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