VICTIM PRECIPITATED CRIME: INTERROGATING PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS RAPE IN IHIALA, ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT: Rape remains one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based violence in Nigeria, yet public discourse is often shaped by victim-blaming attitudes that suggest victims contribute to their own victimization. This study interrogates public perception and attitudes toward rape in Ihiala, Anambra State, through the lens of victim-precipitated crime. Using a mixed-method approach, the study surveyed 250 residents and conducted 15 in-depth interviews with community leaders, students, and women's rights activists. Findings revealed that while some respondents rejected victim-blaming narratives, a significant proportion still attributed rape to women's mode of dressing, night outings, and social behavior. The persistence of such perceptions reflects deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that normalize sexual violence and undermine justice for survivors. The paper argues for comprehensive public sensitization, legal reform, and community-based advocacy to challenge myths around rape and shift cultural attitudes.

Keywords: Victim-Blaming Attitudes, Rape Myths, Patriarchy and Gender Norms, Public Perception of Sexual Violence, Victim-Precipitated Crime Theory

INTRODUCTION

Rape, a form of sexual violence, constitutes one of the most devastating violations of human rights globally. In Nigeria, reports of rape have been on the rise, with both urban and rural communities affected (Amnesty International, 2020). Despite its criminalization under the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015, public discourse around rape often reflects a culture of victim precipitation — the belief that victims, by their behavior or appearance, provoke the crime against them (Wolfgang, 1958). Rape, one of the most devastating forms of gender-based violence, is not only a violation of human rights but also a significant barrier to gender equality and social justice. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimates that one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, with most cases perpetrated by intimate partners or acquaintances. In Nigeria, reports of sexual assault have surged in recent years, with

widespread media coverage of high-profile cases sparking national outrage and advocacy campaigns such as the #SayNoToRape and #JusticeForUwa movements. Despite increased awareness, rape continues to be underreported and poorly prosecuted, reflecting persistent cultural, institutional, and legal challenges (Amnesty International, 2020).

A central obstacle in addressing rape lies in societal attitudes and perceptions, particularly the prevalence of victim precipitation ideology — the notion that victims, by their behavior, dress, or lifestyle, contribute to their victimization (Wolfgang, 1958). While originally framed as a criminological concept to explain interactions in violent crimes, this theory has been widely critiqued for reinforcing rape myths and shifting responsibility from perpetrators to victims (Burt, 1980; Karmen, 2016). Such attitudes not only normalize sexual violence but also silence survivors, discourage reporting, and perpetuate impunity.

In Nigeria, victim-blaming attitudes remain widespread. Women who experience rape are often accused of "provoking" their attackers through indecent dressing, going out at night, or engaging in social relationships with men (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). These perceptions are deeply rooted in patriarchal norms that position women as custodians of morality while excusing male sexual aggression as uncontrollable or natural. This cultural logic continues to thrive in both rural and urban communities, creating an environment where survivors face double victimization — first through the act of rape, and second through stigma, disbelief, and blame (Okonkwo, 2017).

In Ihiala, a commercial hub in Anambra State, incidents of rape and sexual harassment are not uncommon. However, community responses frequently reveal entrenched patriarchal ideologies. Victims are often blamed for dressing "indecently," keeping late nights, or associating with men, while perpetrators are excused on the grounds of provocation or "uncontrollable desire." Such attitudes perpetuate impunity, stigmatize survivors, and discourage reporting.

The situation in Ihiala, Anambra State, exemplifies these challenges. As a rapidly growing commercial town with a youthful population, Ihiala reflects both the progressive forces of modernization and the persistence of conservative, patriarchal ideologies. While cases of sexual violence are frequently reported, community responses often emphasize victim responsibility rather than perpetrator accountability. Local narratives highlight issues such as women's dress codes, nightlife, and peer associations as "causes" of rape, reflecting entrenched rape myths. At the same time, emerging youth and advocacy groups in the area are beginning to challenge these stereotypes, signaling a cultural shift that requires scholarly attention. This paper, therefore, interrogates public perceptions and attitudes toward rape in Ihiala, with a specific focus on victim-precipitated crime. It seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent do residents of Ihiala hold victim-blaming attitudes toward rape? What cultural and social factors shape these perceptions? How do such attitudes affect justice for survivors and the broader struggle against gender-based violence?

By exploring these questions, the study contributes to ongoing debates about the intersection of crime, culture, and gender in Nigeria. Beyond theoretical contribution, the research also offers practical insights for policymakers, educators, and advocacy groups working to dismantle rape

myths, challenge patriarchal ideologies, and strengthen community-based responses to sexual violence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Victim Precipitation and Crime

The concept of victim precipitation was first introduced by Wolfgang (1958) in his seminal study on criminal homicide. He argued that in certain cases, victims may contribute to the dynamics that lead to their victimization through provocation, lifestyle, or risky behavior. While his study primarily addressed homicide, later scholars extended the framework to other forms of crime, including sexual violence. However, the application of victim precipitation to rape has been particularly controversial. Critics argue that it fosters victim-blaming narratives that deflect responsibility from offenders and instead stigmatize survivors (Karmen, 2016). Contemporary victimology emphasizes that, unlike other crimes where interaction may be reciprocal, rape is inherently a crime of power, domination, and coercion (Brownmiller, 1975). Thus, attempts to frame rape within victim precipitation theory risk perpetuating structural inequalities and normalizing violence.

Public Perceptions of Rape

Public attitudes towards rape are central to understanding how societies respond to sexual violence. Adebayo and Kolawole (2013) observed that in Nigeria, rape is often seen less as a crime and more as a moral or cultural failing, with blame disproportionately assigned to women. Research in other African contexts also reveals that rape is frequently framed within patriarchal interpretations of morality, where women's dress, comportment, and sexuality are policed as markers of respectability (Jewkes et al., 2011). These cultural perceptions significantly influence reporting rates, prosecution outcomes, and the recovery of survivors. Bohner et al. (2009) argue that public perception is shaped by rape myths, which are culturally endorsed beliefs that trivialize rape, excuse perpetrators, and shift blame to victims. For example, beliefs such as "only promiscuous women get raped" or "a woman who resists cannot be raped" continue to circulate widely in both rural and urban Nigerian contexts. These myths undermine the seriousness of sexual assault, discourage survivors from seeking justice, and embolden perpetrators.

Rape Myths, Gender Norms, and Patriarchy

The persistence of rape myths cannot be divorced from broader patriarchal structures that shape gender relations. Patriarchy positions men as dominant and women as subordinate, normalizing male control over female bodies (Walby, 1990). In Nigeria, this ideology manifests in cultural expectations that women should be modest, submissive, and morally upright, while men are granted sexual freedom and authority. As a result, rape is often rationalized as the consequence of women failing to conform to these social expectations. Studies (Okonkwo, 2017; Eze-Anaba, 2016) show that patriarchy not only shapes community attitudes but also influences institutional responses to rape. Police officers, judges, and even healthcare providers may share the same victim-blaming beliefs as the wider society, leading to weak enforcement of laws and

retraumatization of survivors. This dynamic illustrates how cultural ideology, legal frameworks, and social institutions interact to perpetuate rape culture.

Nigerian Context: Law, Media, and Advocacy

Despite the criminalization of rape under the Nigerian Criminal Code and the Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015, enforcement remains weak due to cultural stigma, underreporting, and institutional inefficiency (Adetoro, 2019). Survivors often face significant barriers in reporting rape, including fear of shame, disbelief, and pressure from family or community members to remain silent. In many communities, rape cases are "settled" informally through marriage between the victim and perpetrator, or financial compensation, thereby denying survivors justice. The media plays a dual role in shaping public attitudes. On the one hand, sensationalist reporting often reinforces rape myths by focusing on victims' dress, behavior, or location at the time of the incident (Ogunyemi, 2015). On the other hand, digital platforms have emerged as critical spaces for resistance and advocacy. Campaigns such as #BringBackOurGirls, #JusticeForUwa, and #SayNoToRape have amplified survivor voices, challenged patriarchal narratives, and pressured government institutions to act.

Civil society organizations, women's rights groups, and student associations are increasingly central in reshaping perceptions of rape in Nigeria. These actors challenge the discourse of victim precipitation by emphasizing perpetrator accountability and framing sexual violence as a structural issue rooted in gender inequality (ActionAid Nigeria, 2020). However, progress remains uneven, particularly in semi-urban and rural communities like Ihiala, where traditional norms and patriarchal values hold strong sway. The reviewed literature demonstrates that while victim precipitation theory has historical significance in criminology, its application to rape has been problematic due to its tendency to normalize victim-blaming. In Nigeria, public perceptions of rape remain deeply shaped by patriarchal ideologies and rape myths, which contribute to stigmatization, underreporting, and weak justice outcomes. At the same time, shifting discourses—driven by youth activism, media advocacy, and feminist scholarship—offer the possibility of cultural transformation. This study contributes to the existing body of work by interrogating how these conflicting narratives manifest in Ihiala, Anambra State, and how they shape local responses to rape.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of public perceptions and attitudes toward rape in Ihiala. The quantitative survey enabled the collection of measurable data from a larger population, while qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into cultural narratives, community beliefs, and lived experiences. This triangulation enhances the validity of findings and reduces bias (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Study Area

The research was conducted in Ihiala Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria. Ihiala is a semi-urban community and commercial hub located in southeastern Nigeria, characterized by a population dominated by youth, trade, religious influence, and traditional leadership structures. The area was chosen because of increasing reports of gender-based violence, coupled with the coexistence of modern and conservative cultural practices, which makes it a suitable context for studying perceptions of rape.

Population of Study

The target population comprised adults aged 18 years and above residing in Ihiala. This population was chosen because adults are more likely to shape and reproduce community attitudes toward rape and victim precipitation. The study also considered gender, educational level, and occupational diversity to ensure representation of different perspectives.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A sample size of 250 respondents was determined for the quantitative survey, while 15 participants were selected for qualitative in-depth interviews. Quantitative sampling: A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, four communities in Ihiala town were purposively selected due to accessibility and reported cases of sexual violence. Within each community, households were systematically selected, and one eligible adult respondent was randomly chosen from each household. Qualitative sampling: Purposive sampling was employed to select key informants, including women leaders, youth leaders, teachers, religious leaders, and health workers. This ensured that participants with relevant knowledge and influence contributed to the study.

Data Collection Methods

For the purpose of data collection, two instruments were used, one for qualitative and the other for quantitative data. For the quantitative data, the study utilized a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections: Section A, which covers the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, and Section B, which addresses the substantive issues. The researchers administered the questionnaire. The qualitative data were collected using an In-depth Interview Guide (IDI). The guide included open-ended questions that explored community beliefs, cultural justifications of rape, and views on victims and perpetrators. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted in either English or Igbo, depending on the respondents' preference.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

Content validity was ensured by subjecting the instruments to review by three experts in sociology and gender studies. A pilot study involving 20 respondents outside the study area was conducted to assess the clarity and relevance of the study. For reliability, the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data, Responses from questionnaires were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics (frequency tables, percentages, and mean scores) were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics (chi-square tests) examined the relationships between demographic factors and perceptions of rape. Qualitative data: Interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis. Codes were developed inductively from participants' responses and grouped into themes such as victim-blaming, patriarchy, silence, and emerging counter-narratives. Direct quotes were incorporated into the findings to highlight the lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitivity of rape as a research topic, strict ethical protocols were followed: Informed Consent: Respondents were fully informed about the study's purpose and their voluntary participation. Consent was obtained orally or in writing. Confidentiality: Data was anonymized, and no identifying information was included in transcripts or reports. Sensitivity to Participants: Special care was taken to avoid retraumatizing survivors during interviews. Where needed, referrals were provided to local NGOs offering psychosocial support. Approval: Ethical clearance was obtained from the Anambra State Ministry of Health's research ethics committee prior to data collection.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal deep-seated perceptions and attitudes toward rape in Ihiala, Anambra State. Analysis of both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews produced four dominant themes: victim-blaming narratives, patriarchal and cultural justifications, silence and stigmatization, and emerging counter-narratives.

Persistence of Victim-Blaming Narratives

Survey results indicated that 48% of respondents agreed that "indecent dressing" provokes rape, while 37% believed that women who go out at night "invite trouble." In-depth interviews supported these findings, with many participants suggesting that women's lifestyles or behavior expose them to sexual violence.

This aligns with previous research in Nigeria, which shows that rape myths are deeply embedded in public consciousness (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013; Bohner et al., 2009). These myths trivialize the crime, excuse perpetrators, and blame victims. The persistence of such narratives reinforces Wolfgang's (1958) victim precipitation theory, albeit in a problematic way, since it shifts responsibility from the offender to the victim.

From a feminist theoretical perspective, these narratives reflect patriarchal ideology that polices women's bodies and choices, while granting men sexual license (Walby, 1990; Brownmiller,

1975). Thus, instead of framing rape as a violent act of coercion, it is normalized as a response to women's supposed provocation.

Patriarchy and Cultural Justifications

Patriarchal beliefs remain central in shaping community responses to rape. Several interviewees argued that men are "naturally weak" when confronted with female sexuality, thereby placing the burden of prevention on women. A male community elder stated:

"If our daughters dress properly, these things will not happen. Boys are easily tempted."

Such views illustrate how patriarchal ideology excuses male aggression while demanding moral responsibility from women (Okonkwo, 2017). This is consistent with Ryan's (1971) concept of victim blaming, where social structures externalize male responsibility and shift accountability onto victims.

Furthermore, cultural narratives in Ihiala often portray rape survivors as having brought dishonor to their families. This is particularly problematic in marriage negotiations, where survivors may face rejection or stigma. As studies in other African contexts have shown, these cultural justifications contribute to rape culture and perpetuate gender inequality (Jewkes et al., 2011).

Silence and Stigmatization of Victims

The study found that stigma and fear of social rejection discourage survivors from reporting rape. Over half of the survey respondents (56%) believed that "a woman who reports rape humiliates her family." Some community members even suggested marriage between victims and perpetrators as a way of "restoring dignity." This finding resonates with Adetoro (2019), who observed that many rape survivors in Nigeria are pressured into silence to protect family reputation. It also reflects Burt's (1980) idea that cultural myths perpetuate secondary victimization, where survivors face not only the trauma of assault but also societal judgment. The effect of silence is twofold: it reduces reporting rates, undermining justice, and emboldens perpetrators, who know that their actions are unlikely to attract legal or social consequences. This reflects a cycle of impunity that sustains gender-based violence.

Emerging Counter-Narratives

While victim-blaming attitudes were widespread, findings also revealed a generational shift in perception. Younger and more educated respondents rejected rape myths and emphasized perpetrator accountability. For instance, a female university student interviewed argued:

"Rape is never the victim's fault. People should stop excusing men and start punishing them."

These emerging counter-narratives align with the influence of social media campaigns, such as #EndRape and #JusticeForUwa, as well as advocacy by women's rights organizations in Nigeria

(ActionAid Nigeria, 2020). They suggest that feminist perspectives are beginning to gain traction in semi-urban communities like Ihiala, even if patriarchal narratives still dominate.

Linking Findings to Theory

- **Victim Precipitation Theory:** While many respondents framed rape as a victim-precipitated crime, the findings highlight the dangers of applying this theory to sexual violence. It validates harmful stereotypes that blame survivors while obscuring the agency of perpetrators.
- **Feminist Theory:** The findings strongly support feminist critiques that rape is less about sexual desire and more about power, domination, and control (Brownmiller, 1975; Tong, 2009). Patriarchy constructs narratives that excuse male aggression while holding women accountable for violence committed against them.

DISCUSSION

First, the study established that victim-blaming narratives remain widespread**,** with nearly half of respondents attributing rape to women's dress, behavior, or movements. This finding is consistent with earlier studies in Nigeria and other African contexts, which show that cultural myths surrounding rape continue to shape community attitudes (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013; Bohner et al., 2009). Such narratives reflect Wolfgang's (1958) theory of victim precipitation, though its application to sexual violence has been heavily criticized for normalizing blame against survivors (Karmen, 2016). Within feminist scholarship, these beliefs are understood as manifestations of rape culture**,** where violence is trivialized and perpetrators are excused (Brownmiller, 1975).

Second, the findings highlight the centrality of patriarchy and cultural justifications in framing community responses to rape. Interview participants often argued that men's sexual aggression is "natural" and that women bear responsibility for preventing it. This aligns with Ryan's (1971) victim-blaming theory, which shows how structural inequalities allow dominant groups to externalize responsibility for harm. It also echoes Walby's (1990) theorization of patriarchy, where women are positioned as moral guardians while men's authority and behavior remain largely unquestioned. Such justifications reproduce unequal gender relations and sustain impunity for perpetrators.

Third, the study found that silence and stigmatization continue to be significant barriers to justice. Survivors are frequently discouraged from reporting rape due to fear of shame, disbelief, and social exclusion. In some cases, families and community leaders prefer to resolve cases informally, sometimes by arranging marriage between victims and perpetrators. These findings are consistent with Adetoro's (2019) observation that survivors in Nigeria often face secondary victimization from the very institutions meant to protect them. The normalization of silence reinforces impunity and discourages systemic accountability.

Finally, the study revealed emerging counter-narratives**,** particularly among younger and more educated respondents, who rejected rape myths and emphasized perpetrator responsibility. This suggests a generational shift influenced by education, exposure to social media, and advocacy

campaigns such as #SayNoToRape **and** #JusticeForUwa. These counter-narratives resonate with Jewkes et al. (2011), who argue that engaging youth and shifting social norms are critical strategies in preventing gender-based violence.

Taken together, these findings underscore the tension between entrenched patriarchal attitudes that normalize victim-blaming and emerging progressive voices that challenge such beliefs. They confirm that rape in Ihiala is not merely an individual act of violence but a socially constructed phenomenon, deeply embedded in cultural, religious, and gender ideologies. For meaningful change, interventions must therefore go beyond criminalization to address the broader socio-cultural environment that sustains rape myths and silences survivors.

Conclusion

This study interrogated public perceptions and attitudes toward rape in Ihiala, Anambra State, through the framework of victim precipitation and feminist theory. The findings reveal that rape continues to be understood within a victim-blaming cultural logic, where women's dress, movement, and behavior are seen as central to the occurrence of sexual violence. These perceptions reflect the enduring influence of patriarchal structures that position women as guardians of morality and shift responsibility for rape away from perpetrators. The persistence of rape myths, as demonstrated by the survey and interviews, underscores how cultural norms and patriarchal ideologies sustain rape culture. Survivors in Ihiala often face stigma, silence, and secondary victimization, which discourages reporting and perpetuates impunity for offenders. This resonates with Ryan's (1971) theory of victim blaming and validates feminist arguments that rape is less about sexual desire and more about power and domination (Brownmiller, 1975).

At the same time, the study identified emerging counter-narratives**,** particularly among younger and more educated respondents, who emphasized perpetrator accountability and rejected victim-blaming attitudes. These findings suggest a gradual cultural shift that can be harnessed for broader social change. With the rise of advocacy movements, legal reforms such as the VAPP Act, and digital campaigns against sexual violence, there is an opportunity to challenge entrenched patriarchal ideologies and reshape public perceptions.

This study contributes to the discourse on gender-based violence in Nigeria by demonstrating how cultural perceptions reinforce or challenge rape culture. It highlights the need for multi-level interventions—legal, cultural, educational, and media-driven—to combat sexual violence and promote gender justice. Future research may explore how digital activism, youth mobilization, and interfaith engagement can further shift perceptions and accelerate the dismantling of victim-blaming ideologies in Nigerian communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address public perceptions and attitudes toward rape in Ihiala, Anambra State, and Nigeria more broadly:

Community Sensitization and Awareness Campaigns: Traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community-based organizations should lead sensitization programs aimed at dispelling rape myths and challenging victim-blaming narratives. Grassroots campaigns in churches, mosques, markets, and schools can help reshape attitudes by emphasizing perpetrator accountability rather than victim responsibility.

Integration of Gender Education into School Curricula: Schools at all levels should incorporate comprehensive sexuality education and gender studies into civic and social science curricula. This would foster critical awareness among young people, promote gender equality, and challenge patriarchal ideologies from an early age.

Strengthening Legal Frameworks and Enforcement: While the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015 provides a legal basis for prosecuting rape, implementation remains weak. State governments, particularly Anambra State, should ensure full domestication, strict enforcement, and training of law enforcement officers to handle rape cases without bias or victim-blaming.

Victim Support Services: Government and NGOs should establish rape crisis centers in Ihiala and other local communities to provide medical care, legal assistance, and psychosocial support to survivors. Confidential reporting channels and hotlines should be created to encourage survivors to seek help without fear of stigma.

Media Engagement: Local media outlets should adopt ethical reporting standards that avoid sensationalism and victim-blaming language. Media campaigns should highlight survivor-centered narratives and amplify the voices of activists working against sexual violence.

Youth and Digital Activism: Civil society should build on the energy of youth movements and online campaigns such as #SayNoToRape and #JusticeForUwa to mobilize collective action against rape culture. Training programs in digital advocacy can empower young people in Ihiala to challenge rape myths and push for accountability at the community level.

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