Sexual Abuse of Elderly Women in Southwest Nigeria: A Sociological Exposition of an Emerging Crime

Sunday S. Adedayo
Richard A. Aborisade

Department of Sociology
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Nigeria

Abstract
Indeed, appreciable research has considered the dynamics of sexual assault involving young victims. However, very little criminological research has considered the dynamics of sexual abuse of elderly people. To fill this void, this current study developed a profile of sexual abuse cases among women aged 50 and older, based on the accounts of their abusers. Specifically, the study investigated the motives and mechanisms for sexual abuse of the aged in the country as well as the factors that account for the vulnerability of aged women. A sample of 21 elderly sexual abuse offenders from six prisons in Ogun and Lagos states were purposively engaged to shed some light on the nature and dimensions of sexual abuse of elderly women in the country. Results from qualitative analyses of official demographic and offence history data, and in-depth interviews of offenders challenge a couple of commonly held beliefs, assumptions and assertions about sexual abuse of elderly in literature, news journals and public discourse. As against a general belief that young men that sexually abuse older women are ‘money ritualists,’ this study found sexual violence history, mental illness, substance abuse, and sexual deviancy as factors fuelling perpetrators’ action. The majority of perpetrators were intrafamiliar offenders who are family members, neighbours, workers and associates of the victims. Offenders expressed awareness of usual non-reporting of sexual victimisation by the abused, which is a factor that encourages intrafamiliar offending. As a growing social menace in Nigeria, sexual abuse of the elderly is factored by neglect, and exposure of adults to both environmental and situational pressures. Therefore, proper caregiving, meeting of essential needs of the elderly, response from the criminal justice system and encouraging reportage of sexual victimisation are suggested.

Keywords: Elderly women, motives and mechanisms, offenders, sexual abuse, victims

Introduction
During the past quarter century, society has made considerable strides in recognising the problem of sexual violence, responding to victims, and attempting to hold perpetrators accountable (Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall Koss & Wechsler, 2014; Fedina, Holmes, Lynne & Backes, 2016). Sexual abuse is an unwanted sexual activity, with the perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of the person or persons concerned, who are not able to give approval or consent (Kennedy, 2012: 309). Hitherto, cases of sexual abuse were focused on children and young adults or as a form of violence against
Sexual Abuse of Elderly Women in Nigeria

women (Mohler-Kuo et al., 2014; Abidemi, 2015). In the contemporary world, a shift in the form of sexual abuse is being witnessed with attention on the aged or older persons in the society. Globally, the number of cases of elder maltreatment is projected to increase, as many countries have rapidly aging populations whose needs may not be met easily due to resource constraints (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2011). Recognition of older adults as potential and actual victims, however, has lagged considerably behind the realisation that other age groups are vulnerable to sexual assault. Ignorance and myths have contributed to the hidden nature of sexual violence against older adults. Primarily, notions that elders are not sexually attractive or active and that sexual violence is a crime of passion.

Globally, sexual abuse has been adjudged as the least detected, least reported, and least acknowledged form of elder abuse. World Health Organization (WHO) (2008) disclosed that sexual abuse among the aged is underreported by as much as 80%. Supporting the WHO report, in Ireland, it was reported that about 2% of abuse against the aged are sexually inclined and it was further revealed that about 62% of the perpetrators are family members (Health Service Executive Ireland, 2012). The statistics affirms the often seemingly silence on this emerging crime in the society and this creates the need to enhance the availability of reliable data, as a basis for the development of evidence-based policies.

There have been a number of studies that have been conducted to explore the motives and mechanisms of abuse of older persons across the world (Hawks, 2006; Fedina et al., 2016; Gorman & Petersen, 2016). These studies have shown that sexual offenders are attracted by the vulnerability of older women (Jackson & Mallory, 2009; Kennedy, 2012; Kosberg & Garcia, 2015; Munsur, Tareque and Rahman, 2016). Perpetrators seek out potential victims who they perceive as easy to overpower and manipulate. They look for those who would be unlikely to report the assault and who would not be deemed credible if the assault were reported (Byrne, Resnick et al., 1999; Gorman & Petersen, 2016). Older adults are especially vulnerable to sexual violence, and sexual assault among the elderly is one of most hidden crimes in most parts of the world (Burgess, 2004).

In Nigeria, there has been a steady increase in the number of reported cases of young adult sexually assaulting older women (Ani, 2012; Akpan & Umobong, 2013; Asagba, 2015). In Akwa Ibom State, Akpan and Umobong (2013) revealed that about 47% of the elderly surveyed complained of medical neglect and bed sores; 47% experienced some form of physical abuse, 44.7% lack of visitation, 49% uncomfortable living condition and 35%, theft while as high as 16.5% reported sexual abuse. In Lagos State, the form of aged abuse prevalent is medical neglect, while a few also complained of being sexually abused (Sijuwade, 2008). In Ado-Ekiti (Ekiti State) over 58% of the aged had experienced one form of abuse or the other with abandonment and neglect
topping the list (60.9%), followed by financial abuse (41.6%), physical abuse (37.2%) and sexual abuse (32.1%) (Ola & Adeyemi, 2012). This staggering statistics calls for concern as the aged population is fast becoming victims of violent sexual crimes in most parts of Nigeria. To this end, this present study, taking the accounts of the offenders, seeks to examine the factors that led to the vulnerability of sexually assaulted elderly women. Specifically, the sexual violence histories of offenders were documented, while the motives and mechanisms for sexually abusing their aged victims were analysed.

**Theoretical Considerations**

In the early 1970’s feminist scholars began to challenge psychopathology models by advocating for increased awareness about issues of sexual assault. They started questioning the notion that rapists were mentally ill or chemically imbalanced as propounded by the psychopathological scholars (Cano and Vivian, 2001). Feminist theorists drew connections between sexual assault and patriarchy. Brownmiller (1975) argued that sexual assault such as rape is a tool of intimidation used by the victims to control and subdue their prey. She eventually coalesced into the current understanding of sexual assault that rape and other forms of sexual assault are acts of violence, not acts of sexual desire. It was argued that sexual assault is an act of violence which uses sex as a weapon (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2001). It is motivated by aggression and by the desire to exert power and humiliate. It was further argued that although sexual desire is sometimes relevant to issues of sexual assault, perpetrators are motivated by a desire for power and domination.

This is quite similar to control theory where it was postulated that the motivation for abusive behaviours especially within the members of the same family is the urge to dominate and control. The desire to exert authority over other members of the family or a prey as the case may be can explain for the prevalence of sexual abuse/assault among family members (Loseke & Kurz, 2005). The abuser in an effort to gain control employs several tactics such as coercion, isolation, economic, physical and sexual abuse (Bostock, Auster, Bradshaw *et al*., 2002).

The caregiver stress theory proposes that a caregiver who is overburdened by caring demands may encounter a great deal of stress which when unresolved properly may lead to abusive behaviour. In the context of maltreatment of the aged, it has been posited that maltreatment occurs when family members caring for an impaired older adult are unable to adequately manage their care giving responsibilities (Nerenberg, 2002). The elderly victim is typically described as highly dependent on the caregiver, who becomes overwhelmed, frustrated and abusive because of the continuous caretaking demands posed by the elderly person. In Nigeria, the use of designated caregiver homes is not common as most elderly people are entirely left under the care of children or relatives within the urban areas, while they stay on their own in the rural areas. Ola and Adeyemi (2012) reported that more often than
not, the elderly living with their children in urban areas are left vulnerable during the day time, as their children will be away at work.

It is very important to understand that caring for the elderly especially; those with physical and mental challenges are very demanding and stressful. It is therefore assumed that a mounting internal stress and/or external pressure associated with the provision of care to the elderly may erupt into violence if the caregiver is unable to relief him/herself from the stress (Elberta Elderly Abuse Awareness Network, 2015). The impact of this eruption of violence is manifested as an abusive act against the elderly. This theory assumes that to intervene in elderly abuse, the caregiver should be assisted by reducing the burden of work through various forms such as the provision of respite care or employment of more staff. It is noted however that, critics to this theory claims that the theory seems to blame the victims whilst it excused abusers (Burnight and Mosqueda, 2011).

This theory sheds more light on the rationale for sexual abuse especially when old people are becoming the victims. It posits to establish that young people try to exert their dominance on their adults (prey) as a way of gaining control over them. Often time, it is seen as a way repaying the older parents for being too harsh on the young ones when growing up. This theory provides a good empirical background for the study as it helps to have a broader dimension on the prevalence of elder abuse among the adult population in Nigeria.

Materials and Methods
Study Area
This study covered prisons in Ogun state and Lagos state. There are five prisons each in different parts of Ogun and Lagos states but while the target population were found in three Ogun prisons, only two prisons in Lagos accommodate inmates of sexual offenders against elderly women. For the three selected Ogun state prisons, Ijebu prison was established in 1925 with a capacity for 322 inmates. Sagamu prison was established in 1936 with a capacity of 288 inmates, and Ilaro prison was established in 1920s. In respect of the two prisons selected in Lagos state, Ikoyi Prison, located on Akanbi Dammola Street, off Ribadu Road, Lagos Island, was established in 1955 with a capacity of 800 inmates. Kirikiri Maximum Prison, located in Apapa, Ajeromi/Ifeodun was established in 1964 with a capacity of 1,700 inmates. As at time of visitation of the researcher (11 June - 06 July, 2017), most of the inmates of all prisons visited were awaiting trial (ATM) while few had been convicted.

Methods of Data Collection
Qualitative data were obtained from male inmates of selected prisons who are incarcerated for sexually abusing an elderly female victim. For the purposes of
this study, an elderly woman is considered as female who has attained the age of 50 years and above. Desk based information of convicted abusers who have been discharged or bailed from the prisons were also obtained from prison officials in order to document the accounts they submitted to the prison authorities. The study designed In-depth Interview (IDI) Guide which did not include any published or standardised scales that would have provided benchmarks for reliability and validity. In place of this, peer reviewers that comprised experts in the fields of social work, criminology, criminal law and justice, were engaged to ascertain the face and content validity of the instrument. Their suggestions and comments were duly considered in designing the updated version of the instrument.

Approval for the study was obtained from the department of Sociology and Research Ethics Committee of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. Volunteering officials of the Prison assisted to elicit participation of the inmates that fall within the category of the study. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured; while pseudonyms are used throughout this article to refer to participants. Data collected from the field were analysed in line with the research objectives and research questions. Information from In-depth Interviews collected with notes were later transcribed, synthesized and organized under thematic headings. Significant statements were quoted verbatim to corroborate or refute important findings.

During data collection, extensive field notes on any interactions and observations relevant to the study were taken. Upon conclusion of data collection, content analysis was done with the use of a qualitative software program (NVivo). Open coding was used to identify themes apparent in the respondents’ narratives through line-by-line analysis. Once initial memos were written and links between themes became clearer, we returned to the full body of data to begin focused coding. Focused coding helped in ensuring that the themes that emerged from the initial subset of the data were both relevant to and appropriately configured for the full set of data. Focused coding followed a similar line-by-line process to that of open coding, but applied the specific codes that had been identified as important to the theoretical framework.

**Results and Findings**

**Socio-Demographics of the Respondents**

Though the sample of the study was 21, the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents still showed considerable diversity. Data on age, education, and status in the prison were obtained from official record while the rest were obtained from offender self-report. In respect of the status of the respondents in the prisons, trials of majority of them are still ongoing while only four of them are convicted. The study shows that the abusers of the elderly women are quite youthful as 42.8% of the respondents were between the age range 20 – 30 years, while 28.5% of the respondents fall below the age of 20 and between 31 and 40 years respectively. All of them are educated with the least number (9)...
having secondary education while the rest of them (12) are at least primary school certificate holders. Majority of them are of Yoruba ethnic affiliation (21), Christian religion (12) and self-employed (12). The interviews were conducted primarily in English (and occasionally in Pidgin English and Yoruba).

**The Sexual Violence History of the Offenders**

As a prerequisite to understanding the factors relating to offenders’ sexual abuse of elderly women, this study first examined the sexual violence history of the offenders. They were requested to provide information about their sexual history as it relates to the opposite sex. From their response, majority of the offenders were not victims of sexual abuse in their growing up years, as only six (28.57) of them suffered sexual abuse as a child. On the other hand, the table shows that a substantial majority of the offenders had engaged in sexual violence with female acquaintance (51.14), dating partners (90.48) and strangers (52.38) in the past. This implies that they were used to forcefully having their ways with women prior to their sexual assault of elderly women. Further probe of this notion by the researcher from the respondents reveal that eight (42.11) of the 19 that had forceful sex with female acquaintance, dating partners and/or strangers expressed that they ‘enjoyed’ and find forceful sex ‘more interesting’ than consensual sexual intercourse. According to the self-reported data of the respondents, the mean age of the offenders when they had sexual contact with an elderly woman was 23.4 years (range: 17 to 36 years) while 25.2 years (range: 21 to 39 years) was their mean age at first sentence for sexual offence. This depicts that a fair majority of them (51.52%) were not arrested as at the first time they committed the offence. This is further supported by the mean age of offenders in their current infraction which stood at 27.6.

**Offenders’ Explanations on Motives for Sexually Abusing Elderly Women**

The researchers engaged the offenders to explain the motives that spurred them into sexually abusing elderly women. In contrast to the common views that young men sexually assault older women for money ritual purposes, all of the respondents stated that there was no such motive behind their action. They volunteered that they were either under the influence of alcohol or had an uncontrollable sexual urge. One of those that expressed that it was a factor of uncontrollable libido is Akeem who sexually assaulted an 82-year old woman. He expressed:

I went to pluck mango in the old woman’s compound which I usually do regularly. On that particular day, there was no one around except the old woman. All of a sudden, I did not know what got over me; I just pushed the woman to the floor and raped her. (*Akeem/17 years old/Kirikiri maximum prison*)
Three others apart from Akeem also gave accounts of how their uncontrollable sexual urge accounted for their engagement in sexual abuse of aged women. Meanwhile, two of the cases of aged sexual abuse were as a result of mental illness of the offenders. One of them, Thomas, who raped his mother to death, stated that he had a minor mental illness which made him to be staying with his mother. According to him, he started sexually abusing his mother, but in spite of this, the mother was simply enduring the abuse due to the shame that her reporting will bring to the family. But on a fateful day, the mother could no longer bear the abuse and the pains that came with it which made her to refuse his sexual overtures. In his words: “I was aroused and I was more forceful with her, I never knew she was going to die”.

However, majority of them stated that they were under the influence of alcohol that reduced their level of composure and rationality. Sunday, 31 years old, serving a jail term for raping a 62-year old neighbour of his has this to say:

*In the night before going to bed. When I woke up in the morning, I went to take my bath. At that point, my manhood became hard and turgid. On my way to my room from the bathroom, I saw the woman bending down with her backside facing me as I walked towards my room. So, this caught my attention and my manhood was getting stronger and harder and I could not control myself... I raped her... Sunday/31 years old/ Ijebu-Ode prison*

In another account of those that claimed they were under the influence of alcoholic intake, Garuba, a 30-year old *okada* (motorcyclist) man, assaulted a 64-year old female passenger at around 6.30am. He stated that he took alcoholic beverage before setting out early in the morning to start the day’s work. He picked up the woman at Iyana Sabo (Ijebu-Ode Township) and as they were proceeding on the journey, he felt the breast of the woman touching him at his back. He felt sexually aroused and later the woman rested her breast on his back. So, he could not control himself, and drove into a corner of the road where no one could see them and raped the woman.

**Victim-Offenders’ Relationship Prior to Sexual Assault**

The study enquired from the respondents about the relationship that existed between them and their victims prior to the assault they perpetrated. Based on the responses obtained from the respondents, they were grouped into three mutually exclusive categories; 14 of them are categorised as *intrafamiliar* offenders- (those who sexually abused elders within their family setting or known to them); 4 of them falls within *extrafamiliar* offenders- (those who sexually abused elders only outside their family setting or unknown to them); and 3 Mixed-type offenders- (those who had committed acts of elderly sexual abuse both within and outside family settings).

The *intrafamiliar* offenders stated that their familiarities with the victims and knowledge of the environment where the assault took place aided their
decision to carry out their acts. This position, expressed by majority of the *intrafamiliar* offenders raises question on their claim of ‘impulsive action.’ This subtly points to the possibility that there is a measure of calculation and premeditation in the carrying out of the sexual assault. Akinola, a 22-year old who sexually assaulted his 60 years old landlady, and who also claimed that he lost control of himself provided an account that indicated that he made a conscious choice to sexually abuse his landlady.

   It was the devil that prompted me, that morning I went into her sitting room to ask her what she wants me to do for her. I did not see her in the living room and I went to check her in her bedroom. I opened the curtain of her room and saw her naked. I gazed at her for a while but to discover she was fast asleep. While looking at her, I never knew how I got to the bed and raped the landlady. (*Akinola/22 years old/Ilaro prison*)

However, the *extrafamiliar* or stranger offenders only took advantage of the situation, environment and helpless conditions that their victims were under for the sexual assault. Those that stated that they had sexual relationship with elderly women prior to when they were caught pointed out that their previous experience with elderly women gave them some knowledge on how to subdue them in case of resistance. They expressed that elderly women are usually physically too weak to fight off or defend themselves when attacked.

   Further probe was made to enquire from the *intrafamiliar* offenders if the fact that they are known to the victims did not impact on their decision-making process and scare them of the consequences of their action. Eleven of the respondents that fall within this category stated that they thought their victims would not report them based on their notion that most rape cases go unreported. Those of them that are not first time offenders were confident that their victim would keep the experience to themselves. Eight of them said that they were right about their assumption as their victims did not report to the police directly but their families did.

   In order to examine the factors that culminated into the abusive behaviour of the respondents, they were asked to give details of their first sexual encounter with an elderly woman. Six of the 21 admitted that it was not the first time that they had forceful sexual intercourse with elderly women. Four of the six stated that they have equally had consensual sexual intercourse with elderly women in the past. This confirms that six of them have sustained interest in sexual intercourse with elderly women. Ironically, five of these six respondents claimed that they acted on ‘impulse’ when they assaulted the women that landed them in prison.
Mechanisms Deployed by Abusers to Subdue Victims to Sexual Abuse

Responses obtained on the mechanisms deployed in abusing the aged shows that the use of physical strength by the offenders account for the key method used to have their ways with the victims. This may not be unconnected with the disparity between the age of the victims and offenders who are mostly youthful and naturally stronger than the elderly women. Of the 21 offenders interviewed, only one of them, who was part of an armed robbery gang that visited the house of his victim, acknowledges the use of lethal weapons to subdue his 60 years old victim. According to his account:

…we went to the house at about 2.00am with different weapons like cutlass, local gun, knife etc. during the robbery, the gang leader saw the daughter who was partially naked. This aroused him and decided to take the young woman inside to rape her. While he was on the daughter, I was also aroused and saw the old woman lying helplessly in the living room, so before the boss would finish with the young woman in the room, I managed to have my way with the old woman. (Adeoyo/25 years old/Ijebu-Ode prison)

In the use of physical might against the victims, only one of the respondents (who raped his mother to the point of death) admitted that he hit at his victim with his fist in order to have his way. The rest of them described how the physical weakness of their victims made them not to be able to put up a physical defence against their assailants. In spite of this, 11 of them stated that they used physical strength to catch their victims unaware of the impending assault. Pushing to the ground, shoving, exerting force to hold down, tearing at victims’ clothing are some of the mechanisms with which the offenders sexually assaulted their victims. Common responses provided are: “I pushed her from the back, used one hand to cover her mouth, preventing her from calling out for help,” “I pushed her to the ground, pinned her down with one hand and used the other to undress her.”

It is interesting to note that majority of them acted on impulse and claimed that their assault on their victims were not premeditated. A good number of them stated that “I did not know what came over me,” “I could not control myself,” “I did know what got over me.” While the acts of impulse of 10 of them could be related to their alcohol intake, six of those that claimed impulsive act could not identify the factor that led to their “uncontrollable act” as they were not drunk or under any drug influence.

The fact that majority of the offenders are familiar with the victim prior to the assault, made the study to probe further from the respondents to explain why they had impulsive sexual assault on elderly women that they were already familiar with. Twelve of the 16 that claimed they acted on impulse confessed that they had at some periods consider their victims to be ‘beautiful,’ ‘sexy,’ ‘good looking’ prior to the time they that lost control and had non-consensual sex with them. One of them remarked that he had the wrong
impression that the elderly woman had equally found him attractive and wanted to have sexual intercourse with him too. However, the reality dawn on him when the woman cried for help and begged him to stop, but he could no longer bring himself to listen to the pleading of the woman.

Discussions
The outcome of this study debunks some commonly held beliefs, assumptions and assertions about sexual abuse of elderly in literature and public discourses. First, findings from this study disagree with the notion that young men that sexually abuse aged women are ritualists who must have perpetrated the act as part of some money ritual processes (Asogwa & Igbokwu, 2010; Ola and Adeyemi, 2012). This perception is informed by the general disbelief that young men will ordinarily find elderly women sexually attractive to the point of violating them (Fajemilehin et al., 2006). However, the reality presented by this study suggests that young men who have the history of sexually assaulting young women also find elderly women attractive. Meanwhile, some of the young men sexually abused the older women out of the desire to satisfy their sexual curiosity and also because opportunity to sexually take advantage of the women beckoned. This result is in consonance with the position of Jackson and Mallory (2009), Kosberg and Garcia (2015), Munsur, Tareque and Rahman (2016) who posited that sexual offenders are attracted to vulnerability of older women who are often alone and unguarded at specific periods of the day.

Second, this study further exposes the ignorance and myths that have contributed to the hidden nature of sexual violence against older adults. This is primarily premised on notions that elders are not sexually attractive or active and that sexual violence against them is usually a crime of passion. Deviant youths mainly with sexual violent history consider older women easy targets as they are often weak to resist forceful sexual advances. This is similar to the explanations offered on the vulnerability of children and why they are suitable targets to sexual predators who equally take advantage of them (Chinawa, Aronu, Chukwu & Obu, 2013; Aborisade & Fayemi, 2015; Manyike, Chinawa, Aniwada, Odutola & Chinawa, 2015; Aborisade & Shontan, 2017; Aborisade, Adeleke & Shontan, 2018). The study further reveals the lack of desire on the part of the victim to report cases of sexual abuse. This is due to fear of being stigmatised or culturally and socially discriminated on by members of the community. Vierthaler (2008) reported that older women who were sexually abused are oftentimes discriminated against in the society. This could be attributed as a major cause for its prevalence. Consequently, social stereotypes that makes rape reportage difficult in Nigeria among adolescents and child victims or victims’ families, also accounts for the poor rate of reports of sexual assault suffered by elderly women in the country.

The study also supports the description of characteristics of offenders offered by Ramsey-Klawsnik et al. (2008) which included mental illness,
substance abuse, and sexual deviancy. Further findings revealed that one of the factors fuelling the perpetrators action is the influence of alcohol. This is in tandem with Hawks’ (2006) outcome which states that elderly abuse occurred as a result of social disorder, exacerbated by crime, alcohol and drugs. However, the outcome of the present study advanced the position of Testa (2004) that substance abuse is linked with sexual abuse by revealing the strong influence of sexual deviancy and desire to satisfy some sexual fantasy which are only aided by alcoholic influence. There was no specific sociodemographic characteristic that acted as a predictor to young men that sexually abuse elderly women as findings of the study only indicated habitual tendencies. However, young men with sexual violence history predominantly feel the desire to want to vary their sexual violence experience with women of different age categories, thereby making the elderly women part of their exploration. This accounts for one of the major findings of this study which has public health implications.

The study also found that the vulnerability of older women to sexual abuse is predominantly taken advantage of by those that are close to them as family, neighbours, workers and other close associates. Intrafamiliar offenders predominates the types of offenders in all the prisons visited for this study. This may not be unconnected with the fact that they are closer to the women and could easily determine their vulnerability (Gilliland & Picado, 2000; Nerenberg, 2008). Meanwhile, unlike other studies (mostly foreign) that identified caregivers as the most likely offender to sexually abuse elderly women (Decalmer & Glendenning, 1993; Tomita, 1999; Gilliland & Picado 2000; Nerenberg, 2008; Burgess & Clements, 2006), this present study found that lack of caregivers to support the women accounts for their vulnerability to sexual assault.

**Conclusion**

The sexual abuse of elderly women is a growing social menace in Nigeria which is factored by neglect, and exposure of adults to both environmental and situational pressure from the young population in the society. The study was conducted to examine the prevalence, motives and mechanisms of sexual abuse of the aged in contemporary Southwest Nigerian. Often time, more recognition has been given to younger women and child sexual abuse with limited attention paid to aged sexual abuse. In the country, elderly women that reside with their children in urban areas are often left alone at home and vulnerable during the working hours of days as the children would have travelled to their workplaces. If such elderly women are left without caregivers to be with them, they are made vulnerable to both intrafamiliar and extrafamiliar sexual offenders.

The problem of elder sexual abuse cannot be properly solved if the essential needs of older people for food, shelter, security and access to healthcare are not adequately catered for. The society must create an environment in which old people are accepted as a natural part of life, where older people are given the right to live in dignity and free of any form of abuse...
and exploitation. Old people should never be left in isolation. There should be a network or group of old people within each community that will be responsible for the security and wellbeing of old persons in the society such as old people’s home.

Abused old persons should be encouraged to open up whenever they are being subjected to any form of abuse. The more adults begin to open up on incidences of sexual abuse, the more the awareness is created and the likelihood to attract government attention to salvage the situation. Findings from this study revealed a growing awareness amongst offenders that sex crimes often go unreported. Therefore, prospective offenders are never swayed by the fear of being reported by their victims. Laws should be promulgated and enforced to cater for the protection of older persons in the society. Youths and other groups in the society should be given adequate sensitisation on the ills of sexual abuse, in respect of its negative effects and consequences. Finally, and most importantly, the society should desist from discriminating and stigmatising against abused persons as this will aid crime reporting and prosecution and that way curb the future occurrence of such act.

References


World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (2011) WHO Regional Office for Europe guidance for sentinel influenza surveillance in humans. Copenhagen, Denmark.