



Beyond the rhetoric of Genesis 34:1–28: Understanding the rape epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic

**Authors:**

Favour Uroko^{1,2} 
Solomon Enobong^{1,2} 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

²Department of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Solomon Enobong,
enoenosol1@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 27 Jan. 2021
Accepted: 12 May 2021
Published: 01 July 2021

How to cite this article:

Uroko, F. & Enobong, S., 2021, 'Beyond the rhetoric of Genesis 34:1–28: Understanding the rape epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42(1), a2211. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v42i1.2211>

Copyright:

© 2021. The Authors.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

This article explored the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34:1–28 and its implications to the escalating rape cases during the period of the coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in Nigeria. By examining the rape in the pericope and other key passages in the Old Testament, this article argues that it points towards care and justice for victims of rape, and prosecution of rapists. These social ethics are analysed in relation to the contemporary rape epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Like the rape in Genesis, rape victims in Nigeria have little or no access to getting justice and counselling from society, non-government organisations and faith-based organisations, against their aggressors (the rapists). These problems highlight the relevance of this biblical narrative for the policyholders, the government and churches in Nigeria.

Intra/interdisciplinary implications: This research is based on the impact of rape on the victim and the aggressor in Genesis 34:1–28. Similar to what is obtainable amongst Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic, Genesis 34:1–28 reveals that rape has far reaching implications on the victim and the aggressor. It leads to low self-esteem, hate, suicide as well as the death of the aggressor or victim. Disciplines implicated include Old Testament, Religion, Cultural Studies and Sociology.

Keywords: rape; the book of Genesis; COVID-19; coronavirus disease 2019; justice; support.

Introduction

Throughout much of the Old Testament, women were always in the pipeline of being abused during crisis (Ademiluka 2018; Gravett 2004; Kroeger & Beck 2019; Lapsley 2005). Some of these women include Dinah (Gn 34), Hagar (Gn 16:1–16; 21:8–21) and Tamar (Gn 38:1–30). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic revealed this phenomenon of women status in Nigeria. Women have always been endangered persons in Nigeria. However, the period of COVID-19 in Nigeria exposed a critical point of this gender-based violence in Nigeria. Rape is one method of gender abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The special feature of rape during the COVID-19 pandemic was that victims of rape were killed by their aggressors. So, many examples abound. For instance, on 01 June 2020, 18-year-old Barakat Bello was raped and killed with a building block in her parent's house in Oyo State (Toromade 2020). On 27 May 2020, Uwaila Omozuwa, a 22-year-old girl was hit with a fire extinguisher and raped inside Redeemed Church in Edo State, Nigeria (Egbejule 2002). Genesis 34:1–28 presents a similar case of rape, the shame and anguish that befell the victim and the family and capital punishment for the rapist (Pummer 1982; Rofé 2005; Shemesh 2007). In this work, rape is said to occur when these phases are satisfied:

1. When full sexual relations are forced upon a woman by a man without his legal right to have such relations with her.
2. When the act is carried out without the knowledge and consent of the father of the girl or another male who has legal authority over her.
3. When the sexual relations are not intended to create a legal bond between a man and a woman (Fleishman 2004).

Genesis 34:1–28 is a narrative about defilement and rape. It is a story of rape, power and violence (Silbermann 2018). In this pericope, this uncompromising moral standard is compared with the situation in present Nigeria, where helpless women and girls are raped and society does not stand firm against it (Assohoto & Ngewa 2006:63). Dinah in Genesis 34 was uninformed about her

Note: Special Collection: African Hermeneutics.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

environment and Shechem, the aggressor, was fully aware of the inability of the victim to understand her environment. Our study is concerned about the social ethical problem of rape during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we also see the root in primeval history. This study is an exegesis on Genesis 34:1–28 as a lens towards reducing the increasing rape cases during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Firstly, an exegesis was carried out on Genesis 34:1–28. Secondly, this study explores the situation of rape in the present COVID-19-infested Nigeria. It provides that simplifications of the pericope towards ameliorating the escalating cases of rape are explained.

Historical context of Genesis 34

The pericope is more than a family history and deals with tribal history and the relationship of later Israel to Shechem (Clifford & Murphy 2007:34–35). Traditionally, Moses had been thought to be the author of the Pentateuch, and most conservative Bible scholars agree with the traditional view. Jesus attributed the Bible's earliest writings to Moses (Jn 5:45–47), and he referred to the Pentateuch by its traditional title, the Law of Moses (Lk 24:44). The Pentateuch must have been written in about 1400 BC (Hale 2007:126). Some of the Old Testament scholars think otherwise (DeCanio 2010; Dozeman 1999; Stewart 2021). The main reason why Christians have believed that Moses did write Genesis and the four following books are that Jesus and the New Testament writers refer to Moses in connection with them (Goldingay 2016:80).

The narrative gives a revelation of Jacob's journey from Paddan Aram and ended with his safe arrival at the city of Shechem in Canaan (Gn 33:18). He bought a plot of land there from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem and pitched his tent on it (33:20) and called the tent (altar) 'Elohe-Israel' which means 'God is the God of Israel'. Jacob had now given the name Israel, and he uses this name to declare that his God is the almighty God. He did that because this God has given him food and protected him from danger, including those who could have come from Laban and Esau (Assohoto & Ngewa 2006:63). Genesis 34, considered as Hebrew narrative, is a 'short story' fitted into the framework of the Jacob-cycle by means of a historical prologue, and Genesis 33:18 ff. also serves as a 'tranquil prelude' (note the word *salem*, 'safely', in 33:18) to the tragic story which follows (Kessler 1965:3).

The setting of Genesis 34:1–28 was theological as much as it was geographical and historical. It became the written expression of God's will for Israel in terms of His larger purposes in creation and redemption (Merrill 1991:8). Coats demonstrated that the goal is purely etiological (Coats 1983:86).

Literary context of Genesis 34:1–28

Genesis 34:1–28 occurs before the Joseph's cycle of narrative (Gn 37:1–50:26). The Joseph narrative contains Joseph and his brothers (37:1–36), Judah and Tamar (38:1–30), Joseph rises to

Authority in Egypt (39:1:41–57), Joseph's brothers go to Egypt (42:1–45:28), Joseph and his family settle in Egypt (46:1–47:31), Manasseh and Ephraim (48:1–22) and Jacob blesses his sons (49:1–50:26) (Hale 2007:128).

This chapter contains one of the most shameful incidents in Israel's history. The pericope was the epicentre of Jacob's departure from Shalem to Bethel. A terrible crime was committed against Dinah, the daughter of Leah and Jacob. Jacob learnt that his daughter had been defiled but he holds his peace; he awaits the return of his sons from the field (Szpek 2002:104). Jacob seems passive in the whole episode; the role of Shechem's father, Hamor, is to set things right by marriage (Clifford & Murphy 2007:35). When the sons came back and heard about the rape of their sister, their anger grew to wrath. Dinah was forcefully raped by Shechem and the sons of Jacob did not spare Shechem and his entire household. They killed the men of Shechem and Jacob told his sons (Simeon and Levi) that they have troubled his peaceful stay in Shalem, amongst the Canaanite. The Genesis 34 narrative is introduced as episodes in the family history of Jacob.

Literary analysis of Genesis 34:1–28

The pericope has four structures. The first part is v. 1; the second vv. 2–3; the third vv. 4–24 and the last vv. 25–31. The first part discusses the biography of Dinah. She was the daughter of Leah. Leah was the mother of Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar and Zebulun and Dinah. Laban used Leah to deceive Jacob while Laban knew that Jacob loved Rachel and not Leah. (Gn 29:16–30). Inquisitively, Dinah went out to see the environment she was living in. Dinah is the subject that takes independent action by going out to see the young women of the land (v. 1) (Shemesh 2007:18). This is because Jacob had moved to Shalem, a city in Shechem, a part in Canaan. This part could be termed 'because I am woman'.

The second part explored how Hamor took notice of Dinah and looked for a way to attract her attention. Instead of engaging dialogue, he grabbed her and raped her. Shemesh reveals that the story described abduction marriage and should not be seen as rape (Shemesh 2007:18). However, the arguments in the close reading reveal that the victim Dinah did not agree to have sex with Shechem but she was forced. After he had raped her, he realised that he should have discussed it kindly with Dinah, to seek her consent. This segment could be termed 'The rapists mastered the routines of their victim to accomplish their criminal intentions'.

In the third part, the parents and family members of Hamor and Dinah showed a different response to the rape orchestrated by Shechem. The story is not totally about the wrong carried out to Dinah herself, a woman whose control over her own body was violated, but about the injustice carried out to her family – the embryonic Israelite nation – the profaning of the family honour (Shemesh 2007). Firstly,

the family members of Dinah, the victim, were grieved that this thing had happened to the only daughter of the house. Jacob, the father of the victim, held his peace, and the brothers of the victim were grieved and filled with wrath. Secondly, the family of Shechem, the aggressor, led by his father, Hamor, came to tell the victim's family that Hamor, the rapist, loved their daughter and would like to take her for a wife. Fleishman calls this abduction marriage (Fleishman 2004:12). The structure could be termed as a 'response of the family and society to the victims and aggressors of rape'.

The last part exposes the devastating effects of rape on both the survivors and the society at large. Dinah was silent in this final structure. Blyth laments that Dinah remains a marginal character throughout the story and her experience is contextualised by the author within a strictly patriarchal ideological framework, thereby denying her a voice with which to articulate and focalise her thoughts, feelings and pain (Blyth 2009:483). It was Simeon and Levithat who took the sword and killed all the male children of Hamor's lineage, killed Hamor the rapist, killed the father of the rapist and destroyed all their property. On the other hand, Jacob whose daughter was raped, knew that he was in danger because of the destruction of Shechem, and he cried against his sons for causing trouble for him. The sons, instead, told Jacob that their action was to avenge the rape of their sister. This part could be called 'the need to declare a state of emergency on rape'.

A close reading of the Genesis 34:1–28

The section will help us to interpret the text and draw the appropriate lessons. By doing a close reading, we are able to delve deeper into the text, analyse, interpret and infer using a variety of literacy skills. Close reading helps researchers to understand the purpose of reading that text (Dakin 2013:5).

Because I am woman (v. 1)

Dinah was proclaimed a woman. Hebrew נָחַמָּה which means daughter, daughters, stranger or woman was used in v. 1, to show that Dinah was a teenage daughter. She was the daughter of Jacob's first wife, Leah. Furthermore, we are told that she went out (וַתֵּצֵא) (Kohlenberger 1987:92) to see other daughters (בְּתוּלוֹת) of the land of Canaan. Hebrew וַתֵּצֵא derived from יָצָא [going out] means that Dinah, not known to the people around, went out and was admired and through the process became known to people around. Dinah went to visit other girls in Canaan. The Hebrew word used for visit was לָרְאוֹת [to visit]. Hebrew לָרְאוֹת derived from רָאָה [see, visit, experience, search and watch] demonstrates that Dinah went to see the girls around, just to become familiar with the people or to keep in touch with friends who were all girls (Holladay 1988:329).

The rapists mastered the routines of their victim to accomplish their criminal intentions (vv. 2–3)

When Dinah went out to see her fellow girls, she was admired by a man called Shechem. Dinah who wanted to see, ended

up been seen by a young man, Shechem. Hebrew רָאָה from the word, רָאָה which means to look, to see, to consider, keep on looking, make an inspection, was used to tell how Shechem, a prince of a royal family of the Hivites admired Dinah. The term Hivites is used in the general terms for 'Canaanite', but the LXX used 'Horite' for Hivites (Clifford & Murphy 2007:35). He kept on looking for ways to get her, and developed an interest in and lust for her. He made an inspection through search and saw that she could be raped without much hindrance. After admiring her, he took (וַיִּקַּח) Dinah and raped her. The Hebrew וַיִּקַּח derived from קָח [to take, to catch, to capture, to lay, to seize or to use] demonstrates that Shechem captured Dinah, seized her and raped (וַיִּזְנוּ) her. The series of verbs: seized, lay and abused, give a strong impression of the use of force (Sternberg 1987:446). The Hebrew וַיִּזְנוּ was derived from זָנָה meaning to rape, to afflict, busied with, mishandle by imprisonment or bonds. Dinah became an object to be moved from place to place, afflicted and handled as Shechem wished (Shemesh 2007:18). Shechem took Dinah to his house and cohabited with her, and her father and brothers resented the defilement (Hastings et al. 1930:1991). This affliction is rape. For a better understanding, rape involves physical and psychological violence (Coleman 2010:5) on their victim. Shechem apparently abducted Dinah, brought her to his own house and raped her (Schmutzer 2011:140). This shows that Shechem raped Dinah by making himself busy with her (for long time), thus afflicted her with violence. He afflicted her by laying (וַיִּשְׁכַּב) with her. The Hebrew וַיִּשְׁכַּב [to lie down, make your bed, rest] shows that Shechem captured Dinah and took her to his bed, and defiled her.

The response of the family and society to the victims and aggressors of rape (vv. 4–24)

The response to this case of rape is a double edged sword. Firstly, the family of Dinah responded; secondly, the family of Shechem responded. In v. 4, Shechem came and told the father to get (וַיִּקַּח) Dinah, said that he loved Dinah and would want her for a wife. There was nothing wrong about his falling in love with Dinah, what was wrong was the fact that he took her before she became his wife (Assohoto & Ngewa 2006:63). He hid the main motive of his ambition which was the rape of Dinah. The Hebrew וַיִּקַּח means to get, to bring, to buy, to capture, to marry, signifying that Shechem wanted Hamor to go and bring Dinah to him, in whatever way or strategy he deemed possible. In v. 5, when Dinah told her father, Jacob, of her rape by Hamor, Jacob was very sad (וַיִּתְּרַשׁ) [silent, to engrave, speechless, refrain] and could not do anything, refrained himself, waiting for his sons to come back. In v. 7, when the brothers came back and heard that their sister was raped, they were grieved (וַיִּזְנוּ) [means hurt, pain, vex] indicates that the brothers felt the pain that Dinah and Jacob felt. From vv. 8–12, Hamor and his son Shechem came to Jacob and his sons to seek for Dinah's hand in marriage. They said that they were prepared to pay anything as dowry and present any gift required for them. From vv. 13–17, the sons of Jacob deceitfully admitted that they would allow Shechem to marry Dinah, however on the condition that he

and all males in the land of Shalem be circumcised. In vv. 18–24, Hamor and Shechem were happy with the decision of Jacob and his sons. They pleaded with the men of the land (v. 20) to circumcise themselves. In fact, they said that indirectly, everything that Jacob and his household have, their cattle and substance belong to the people of Shalem. Thus, they wanted to deceive the family of Jacob twice. The entire male populace in Shalem was circumcised.

The need to declare a state of emergency on rape (vv. 25–31)

In v. 25, there is the indication that Hamor's failure to declare the action of Shechem as evil and shameful propelled the children of Jacob to declare a state of emergency on the rape of their sister by themselves. Even though it was not literally presented as Hamor having the knowledge that his son raped Dinah, the fact that his son suddenly requested to marry Dinah should have given him a clue that something was wrong somewhere. In v. 25, Hamor, Shechem and the men of the land were in pain (תִּצְרִיחַ [צָרָה]). The Hebrew צָרָה means to be in pain, grief, indicating that Jacob's sons ensured that the rapist and his family members pass through the same pains, suffering and anguish that their sister, their father and themselves went and still were going through. In v. 25, Simeon and Levi (children of Jacob) killed Hamor, Shechem and the men of Canaan. They plundered everything that could be found in the city and even also captured (לָקַח) their wives just like Shechem captured their sister Dinah (v. 29). The Hebrew לָקַח means to carry off, to keep, captives. The sons of Jacob made sure that they made women captives, as well as goods and properties of the people of Shalem.

This study of the pericope reveals that Dinah was actually forced into sexual intercourse by Shechem. It is at this juncture that a study of rape during the COVID-19 era in Nigeria will be explored.

The COVID-19 pandemic and rape epidemic in Nigeria

Nigeria's vice president, Yemi Osibanjo described the present rape epidemic in Nigeria as an unacceptable behaviour and a blemish on Nigeria's collective humanity and dignity as a people and as a nation (Adetayo 2020:1). On 25 February, Nigeria recorded her first index case of the COVID-19 virus. It was on 27 February 2020 that the Federal Ministry of Health declared the first index case. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC 2020), this index case was:

[A]n Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on 25 February 2020. He was confirmed by the Virology Laboratory of the Lagos University Teaching Hospital, part of the Laboratory Network of the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. (p. 1)

Nigeria Centre for Disease Control is the body in charge of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and also sees to reducing the spate of its transmission.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought in a new phase of rape scenario in Nigeria (as shown in Table 1). Rape became a household name because of the geometric progression of reported cases (Aljazeera 2020; Vanguard 2020). Students and civil servants were at home because of the fact that there was lockdown. Social crimes increased and the most reoccurring and fatal of them all was this rape culture. The Domestic and Gender Violence Response Team (DGVRT), according to Umukoro (2020), received a report of an average 13 new cases daily of abuse and in the month of March 2020, received 390 reports. The report further shows that there is an increase of 60% in domestic violence, a 30% rise in sexual violence and a 10% increase in physical child abuse. The married, the unmarried, teenagers, children and

TABLE 1: Rape cases in Nigeria during COVID-19.

S.no.	Rape case	Date	Source
1	A 25-year-old man, Aminu Bala, raped and killed his elder brother's wife in Gusau.	15 June 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/nwest/397850-man-rapes-kills-brothers-wife-in-zamfara.html
2	The 21-year-old Grace Oshiagwu was raped to death in Oyo State.	14 June 2014	https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/06/14/another-student-grace-oshiagwu-raped-murdered-in-ibadan/
3	A 23-year-old man, Badmus Quadri, arrested for defiling his neighbour's three-old child in Owode community, Ogun State.	11 June 2020	https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/06/man-arrested-for-defiling-3yr-old-girl/
4	27-year-old Patrick Onoja dragged a seven-year-old child into a church hall at Ngurute and had carnal knowledge of her.	09 June 2020	https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/06/benue-man-arrested-for-allegedly-raping-7-year-old-girl-in-church/
5	A medical doctor has allegedly raped his 11-year-old housemaid in Otukpo metropolis in Benue State.	09 June 2020	https://dailytrust.com/medical-doctor-rapes-11-yr-old-housemaid-in-benue
6	A 12-year-old girl, Blessing, is said to have been gang raped by four masked men at her residence in Abijo area of Ajah, Lagos State.	04 June 2020	https://punchng.com/rape-epidemic-four-masked-men-gang-rape-12-year-old-girl-in-lagos/
7	A 45-year-old woman, Susanna Iwuoha, was raped and killed in a stream in Imo State.	03 June 2020	https://guardian.ng/news/mother-of-four-sexually-violated-murdered-in-imo/
8	A 25-year-old man, Wasiu Bankole, raped a 70-year-old woman.	02 June 2020	https://guardian.ng/news/i-raped-70-year-old-woman-under-influence-of-alcohol-man-confesses-in-ogun-state/
9	11 men allegedly raped a 12-year-old girl in Jigawa State.	01 June 2020	https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/06/01/police-arrest-11-men-for-raping-12-year-old-girl-in-jigawa/
10	An 18-year-old teenager, Barakat Bello, was gang raped and murdered by rapists in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital.	01 June 2020	https://dailypost.ng/2020/06/04/another-18-year-old-student-bello-barakat-allegedly-gang-raped-killed-in-ibadan/
11	Vera Uwaila Omozuwa, a 22-year-old microbiology student, was raped and killed inside a church in Edo State.	27 May 2020	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/02/and-of-student-in-church-sparks-outrage-across-nigeria
12	Elijah Orhonigbe, a bishop and the founder or general overseer of Victory Revival Fasting and Prayer Ministry in Warri, raped a 19-year-old girl inside the church.	20 May 2020	https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/396710-police-arrest-pastor-for-allegedly-raping-19-year-old-woman.html

adolescents, as far as the person is female, were affected. Some were raped in their parents' house; others were raped in their own room. Unfortunately, some were raped in the church, the supposed house of God. Others were raped in streams and farms. No time of the day was safe for girls: morning they were raped, afternoon they were raped and night they were raped. This forced Nigerians to call for a state of emergency to be declared on rape (Adebayo 2020). But there is a peculiar feature of the rape epidemic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, most of the victims of rape during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria were killed. Rapists smashed their victims' heads with a gas cylinder and building blocks, suffocated them and cut them with a cutlass. Most of the perpetrators leave no traces for security agents (Obiezu 2020). Some of the rape cases recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria are discussed below.

Causes of the increased rape epidemic in Nigeria

The causes of rape cannot be underestimated. They include:

1. **The lockdown of schools:** No thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating effects on Nigerians. Most of the students, who were cohabiting with their girlfriends or go to prostitutes, have not found it easy, thus, unable to stay without sexual intercourse. Thus, in order to satisfy their sexual arousal, they look for a female victim. Furthermore, some teenagers who were busy with work or school, and because of the COVID-19 lockdown, are now idle, and became tools in the hands of the devil.
2. **Low socio-economic status:** This increased their susceptibility because of the inability of themselves or their family to provide the finance for a legal battle against their rapists. Also, the rapists know that raping the children and wives of the poor will be successful, and their victims cannot fight for justice because of their economic status. Sometimes, the family of the victims and their aggressors settle their matter because they are from the same village, ethnic group, social status, unequal power relations or same society whilst the victim is ridiculed by her tormentor (Tade 2020).
3. **Lack of self-control:** Most men, youths or teenagers who perpetrate this act do so because of the lack of self-control. They are sexually aroused, and lack of discipline and ability to subdue this inordinate ambition force them in engaging into raping any girl seen around.
4. **No declaration of a state of emergency on rape:** Nigeria's leadership architecture has not declared a state of emergency on rape – notwithstanding the escalating nature of it. Lip service is only paid to cases of rape by the executive, legislature, judiciary and even security agencies. Rapists who were arrested are released without prosecution. This makes other rapists feel at home with raping girls or women. Rape cases are treated like family matters and settled illegally. Rape, spousal battery,

sodomy and other aberrative behaviours, rather than being a crime against the state, were treated as family matters (Ajayi 2020). Serious legislation which will condemn the acts of rapists and charge them to long-term imprisonments without an option of fine is lacking in Nigeria. This is the reason why the COVID-19 era provided an avenue for the rise of rape acts in Nigeria.

5. **Lack of political will by leaders:** Leaders at all levels of administration (federal, state and local government levels) find it difficult to invoke sections 357 and 358 of the *Criminal Code Act* and section 258 of the penal code, and also section 1 of the *Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act*, 2015. Also, there is no enforcement of chapter 4 of the Nigerian Constitution which prohibits inhumane treatment and violation of their life. The *Criminal Code Act* prescribes a punishment of life imprisonment for anyone convicted of rape with or without canning. Also, the law makes it clear that the attempt to rape attracts 14 years of imprisonment. In Nigeria, there is no want of laws; it is the behaviour of the criminal justice system (Tade 2020). These laws and acts were made to protect the girl child, but unfortunately, it has not been enforced on rapists of the COVID-19 era.
6. **Silence caused by fear of stigmatisation:** Unfortunately, because of the fear of stigmatisation, most rape victims usually do not report their demise in order to get the expected justice. I strongly believe that once people are educated and enlightened on what to do regarding rape cases, we would see an increase in convictions and that would go a long way in reducing the rising cases of rape in Nigeria (Olajide 2020). Usually in Nigeria, silence by victims of rape stems from fear: whether paralysing fear that prevents her from taking any action or deliberate fear – the fear that physical or vocal resistance will cause the rapist to resort to physical violence or even kill her (Russell 1975:57).

Impacts of the COVID-19 rape epidemic in Nigeria

The influence of rape during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. Some of them are listed below:

1. **Girl child becomes endangered species:** Female teenagers and women are afraid of going out. They are now constituted endangered species. Mothers are afraid of leaving their girl child at home. For instance, Blessing, on 04 June 2020, was raped in her father's house. When the and mother went out, four masked men jumped into the house through the fence. They took her inside and took turns to rape her, leaving her with multiple injuries (Omogbolagun 2020).
2. **Blaming of victims:** Women are being accused of orchestrating their victimisation status. Women are accused of dressing scantily, which is the main reason why men raped them. The perpetrators are not condemned, instead the victims are. For instance, a mother beat her 2-year-old daughter and called her

'*ashawo*' which means 'prostitute', after the child was raped by a man at Idumota (Ikeji 2020). Furthermore, Nigerian lawmakers indicated that women may be causing their own rape by dressing revealingly (Toromade 2020).

3. **Physical injuries and death:** Victims of rape have suffered physical injuries and even death. For instance, Grace Oshiagwu, Susanna Iwuoha, Barakat Bello, Vera Uwaila Omozuwa and Elijah Orhonigbe were all raped to death. Other victims suffered physical defects on their eyes and bodies, amongst others.
4. **Suicide attempts:** It also has emotional impacts on the victims, such as depression and low self-esteem. The victims sometimes resort to committing suicide because of shame from their family members, friends and neighbours.

Implications of Genesis 34:1–24 in the Nigerian scene

Firstly, women love to explore their environment, similar to men. This was exactly what Dinah did in the land of Canaan. She went out to see her friends, hoping to curb the boredom at home – staying just with family members. Also, we were told that it was girls of her kind that she went with to see in the land. Dinah represents the young women in Nigeria who want to see the world and have their fling; her conduct was indiscreet, and all concerned paid the consequences dearly (Cray 1999:67). It could be observed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, in their nature of exploring the environment, most ladies looked for friends and classmates, new environments to visit, just to curb the boredom of the lockdown. They have fewer activities that they are engaged in – because schools, markets and churches were eventually shut down.

Secondly, Dinah was raped because she moved alone, being a stranger in her current environment. She had been moving always without recourse, to the point of being admired inordinately by Shechem. This shows that women had always been an endangered species. Shechem, a man, captured Dinah, raped her to his satisfaction with no challenge from anyone. After forcing Dinah into illicit intercourse with him, Shechem falls in love with her and wishes to marry her at all costs. The inhabitants of the city, with Hamor as spokesman, attempt to negotiate the marriage in all innocence, but are rebuffed (vv. 8–14) (Barton & Muddiman 2007:59). This is similar to the situation of women in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic. They were raped by their aggressors through capture. They were raped by people whom they had no relationship or feelings for. These were people they never thought were observing them.

Thirdly, rape affects the family of the victim. The victim, Dinah, and the family felt so grieved about the rape of their daughter and only sister. The family may have kept the rape incidence within the family. This may be to prevent the shame that the broadcasting of the news would have on

Dinah and Jacob's family. On the other hand, the aggressor family was not ashamed of their act even though it was indirectly alluded to in v. 4. A request is granted most of the time based on pieces of evidence of the merit of the request. The parents, rather than reprimanding their son for having forceful sexual intercourse with someone's daughter, instead came to Jacob, asking for the girl's hand in marriage (vv. 8–9). This is also tenable in Nigeria. Victims of rape are helpless because of their neglect by society. Also, aggressors move freely on the streets of Nigeria without prosecution from law enforcement agencies. The family members of the victims are also mostly those with low income, thus, they lack the ability to legally prosecute the rapists.

Fourthly, because of the fact that there was no law on the ground as a social control mechanism, Dinah, the victim, was left to her fate. The family was helpless in the face of the failure of society to protect women, of which Dinah fell as victim to. The family of Dinah decided to avenge the rape of their sister illegally which had far reaching consequences for both the aggressor and the family of the victim. They asked Hamor and his kindred to be circumcised. The imposing of circumcision on all the Shechemite men as a condition of the marriage is a trick with sinister and ironical overtones, a mere excuse for the real cause of the massacre, the desire for revenge for the initial rape (v. 31) (Barton & Muddiman 2007:59). No justification can be found for the criminality of Jacob's sons (vv. 18–29). That Jacob appreciated its enormity, not only his fear (v. 30) but also his later loathing of it and his curse upon its instigators (49:5–7), show (Cray 1999:67).

The rapists and his family lost their lives; the family of Dinah was made to relocate. This is also similar to the Nigerian rape cases. There is a lack of political will to prosecute rapists in line with all the laws and by-laws against rape by law enforcement agencies. Most of the time, rape cases are swept under the carpet; also victims are coerced into paying a large amount of money to security agents so that justice can be achieved in their case. This leaves the family of the victim with no other alternative than to seek ambush or assassination of the rapists without a due process.

Suggestions

The following recommendations would help to ameliorate the spate of rapes during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria:

1. During this period of lockdown in Nigeria, women should be careful of where they go to and friends they visit. They must let their family members know where they intend to go and when they intend to go.
2. There is the need for a declaration of a state of emergency on rape. All energy should not be geared towards finding solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic with a neglect of prosecution of rapists. Thus, Nigeria's criminal justice system should be strengthened, so that it would aid the enforcement of existing laws and punishment of convicted rapists.

- The government, non-governmental organisations and even faith-based organisations should come to the aid of rape victims by sponsoring their medical bills and helping them seek justice in the prosecutions of their aggressors.
- Blaming victims of rape will only guarantee rapists the confidence to continue in their act. There is the need for the protection of victims of rape and their identity.
- There is an urgent need to strengthen the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, the National Human Rights Commission and other sexual offences units and gender agencies so that gender-based violence such as rape would not be escalating at the current level.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria came with many social problems in Nigeria. Rape became an epidemic that ravaged women during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Female children, teenagers and elderly women became victims of rape in Nigeria. The disturbing factor about the type of rape during the COVID-19 era was that it was fatal (victims were killed by their aggressors). This problem was observed from the lens of Genesis 34:1–28. The pericope stated how Dinah, being naïve, was raped by Shechem. After the rape, she became a silent figure throughout the narrative. The aggressor, Shechem, moved freely; the brothers of the victim took the law into their own hands by killing Schechem, and also their act had far-reaching consequences on their victims.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Both F.U. and S.E. contributed equally to this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

References

- Adebayo, B., 2020, *Nigerian state governors resolve to declare state of emergency on rape following spate of sexual violence*, viewed 12 June 2020, from <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/06/12/africa/nigeria-state-of-emergency-rape/index.html>.
- Ademiluka, S.O., 2018, 'Patriarchy and women abuse: Perspectives from ancient Israel and Africa', *Old Testament Essays* 31(2), 339–362. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2018/v31n2a5>
- Adetayo, O., 2020, 'Osinbajo meets NHRC, says rape unacceptable behaviour', *Punch*, 19 June, p. 1.
- Ajayi, O., 2020, 'Declare state of emergency on rape, SGBV, NHRC tells FG', *Vanguard*, 16 June, p. 1.
- Aljazeera, 2020, 'Nigerians go online to demand "justice" for abuses against women', viewed 02 June 2020, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/6/2/nigerians-go-online-to-demand-justice-for-abuses-against-women>.
- Assohoto, B. & Ngewa, S., 2006, 'Genesis', in T. Adeyemo (ed.), *Africa Bible Commentary*, p. 63, Word Alive Publishers, Nairobi.
- Barton, J. & Muddiman, J., 2007, *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Blyth, C., 2009, 'Terrible silence, eternal silence: A feminist re-reading of Dinah's voicelessness in Genesis 34', *Biblical Interpretation* 17(5), 483. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851508X401150>
- Clifford, R. & Murphy, R.E., 2007, 'Genesis', in R.E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer & R.E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, pp. 34–35, Indira Printers, New Delhi.
- Coats, G.W., 1983, *Genesis, with an introduction to narrative literature*, vol. 1, p. 86, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Coleman, M.A., 2010, *The Dinah project: A handbook for congregational response to sexual violence*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.
- Cray, J., 1999, *Concise Bible commentary*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA.
- Dakin, C., 2013, 'The effects of comprehension through close reading', Master's dissertation, St. John Fisher College.
- DeCanio, F., 2010, *Introduction to the Pentateuch*, viewed 12 December 2010, from <https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-pentateuch>.
- Dozeman, T.B., 1999, 'The authorship of the Pentateuch', *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32(4), 87–112.
- Egbejule, M., 2002, 'How 100-level UNIBEN student was gang-raped, murdered inside church', *The Guardian*, 01 June, p. 1.
- Fleishman, J., 2004, 'Shechem and Dinah, in the light of non-biblical and biblical sources', *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 116(1), 12–32. <https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.2004.001>
- Goldingay, J., 2016, *An introduction to the Old Testament: Exploring text, approaches and issues*, Graphica Limited, Hong Kong.
- Gravett, S., 2004, 'Reading "rape" in the Hebrew Bible: A consideration of language', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28(3), 279–299. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920402800303>
- Hale, T., 2007, 'Genesis', in D.C. Cook (ed.), *The applied Old Testament Commentary*, pp. 126–127, David C Cook, Colorado Springs, CO.
- Hastings, J., Selbie, J.A., Lambert, J.C. & Mathews, S., 1930, *Dictionary of the Bible*, Charles Scribner's sons, New York, NY.
- Holladay, W.L., 1988, *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Zonderan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Ikeji, L., 2020, *Nigerian mother beats, blames and calls her 2-year-old daughter an 'ashawo' after being raped (video)*, viewed 07 May 2020, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBlvQlDuOU/?hl=en>.
- Kessler, M., 1965, 'Genesis 34 – An interpretation', *Reformed Review* 19(1), 3.
- Kohlenberger, J., 1987, *The interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament*, Zonderan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Kroeger, C.C. & Beck, J.R. (eds.), 2019, *Women, abuse, and the Bible: How scripture can be used to hurt or heal*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.
- Lapsley, J.E., 2005, *Whispering the word: Hearing women's stories in the Old Testament*, John Knox Press, Westminster.
- Merrill, E.H., 1991, 'A theology of the Pentateuch', in R.B. Zuck (ed.), *A biblical theology of the Old Testament*, p. 8, Moody Press, Chicago, IL.
- Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020, *First case of corona virus disease confirmed in Nigeria*, viewed 28 February 2020, from <https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/227/firstcase-of-corona-virus-disease-confirmed-in-nigeria>.
- Obiezu, T., 2020, 'Nigeria sees spike in rape cases, sexual violence during pandemic', viewed 18 June 2020, from <https://www.voanews.com/episode/nigeria-sees-spike-rape-cases-sexual-violence-during-pandemic-4327176>.
- Olajide, U., 2020, 'I raped 70-year-old woman under influence of alcohol, man confesses in Ogun State', *Guardian*, 05 June, p. 1.
- Omogbolagun, T., 2020, 'Rape epidemic: Four masked men gang-rape 12-year-old girl in Lagos', *Punch*, 06 June, p. 1.
- Pummer, R., 1982, 'Genesis 34 in Jewish writings of the Hellenistic and Roman periods', *The Harvard Theological Review* 75(2), 177–188. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000018290>

- Rofé, A., 2005, 'Defilement of virgins in biblical law and the case of Dinah (Genesis 34)', *Biblica* 86(3), 369–375.
- Russell, D., 1975, *The politics of rape: The victim's perspective*, Stein and Day, New York, NY.
- Schmutzer, A.J. (ed.), 2011, *The long journey home: Understanding and ministering to the sexually abused*, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR.
- Shemesh, Y., 2007, 'Rape is rape is rape: The story of Dinah and Shechem (Genesis 34)', *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 119(1), 2–21. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ZAW.2007.002>
- Silbermann, A., 2018, *Jacob's silence and the rape of Dinah*, viewed 22 November 2018, from <https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/jacobs-silence-and-the-rape-of-dinah/>.
- Sternberg, M., 1987, *The poetics of biblical narrative: Ideological literature and the drama of reading (biblical literature)*, Biblical Literature, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.
- Stewart, D., 2021, *When did Moses write, or compile, the book of Genesis?*, viewed 02 May 2021, from https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_678.cfm.
- Szpek, H., 2002, *Re-imagining Eve and Adam: And other brief essays*, Writers Club Press, iUniverse, New York, NY.
- Tade, O., 2020, 'Preventing another Uwa and Barakat's tragedy', *The Vanguard*, 11 June, p. 1.
- Toromade, S., 2020, 'Rape, murder of teenager refuels national outrage against rapists', viewed 06 March 2020, from <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/barakat-bello-rape-murder-refuels-national-outrage-against-rapists/eqrdx9v>.
- Umukoro, E., 2020, 'Amidst COVID-19 lockdown, Nigeria sees increased sexual and gender violence', *Premium Times*, 05 June, p. 1.
- Vanguard, 2020, 'Tackling Nigeria's rape crisis', *The Vanguard*, 18 June, p. 1.