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"*THEY ARE SEXUAL OBJECTS*": CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE RAPE VICTIMS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Following the assumption that there is a particular way newspapers often use language to represent female rape victims (FRVs) and the insufficiency of existing studies on the linguistic representation of FRVs in Nigerian newspapers, this study critically discusses the linguistic and discursive tools that are deployed by selected Nigerian newspapers to represent FRVs in their reports. Aspects of Halliday's transitivity system and Lazar's notion of feminist critical discourse analysis served as framework. The framework was complemented with the use of Voyant tools to determine the preponderance of word choice in news reports. Rape reports published between January, 2020 and December, 2020 by The Punch, The Guardian, Vanguard and Daily Trust were purposively retrieved and constituted the data for this study. Data engagement revealed that FRVs were imbued with five representations: patriarchal preys, object of sexual gratification, anonymized and pseudonymized victims, objects of pity and victims of dual jeopardy. The social implications of these representations aligned with patriarchal practices such as androcentrism, incest, mental abuse and sexual assault while the gender biases implicated in the representation included the projection of female as inferior, powerless and emotional beings.

Keywords: Rape discourse ▪ sexual objects ▪ violence against women ▪ female rape victims ▪ Nigerian newspapers ▪ discourse analysis

1.   INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been identified as one of the social ills that continue to pervade the human society, including Nigeria. At the forefront of the many dimensions of GBV, 'a world-wide phenomenon' (Oparinde & Matsha 2021, p.1), is rape. Rape, defined as a form of sexual intercourse that disregards the consent of the victim, has been a common phenomenon in Nigeria and the world over. Rape is also seen as a prevalent feature in a patriarchal society like Nigeria. What is a patriarchal

society or tradition? Patriarchal tradition is a practice in which a male becomes *Subject*, while the female becomes *Object*. The patriarchal nature of Africa, therefore, explains why gender is binarized – man is seen as the core, while woman is the *other* (Ncube & Moyo, 2011); thus, women are relegated and subjected to abjection in different spheres of life (Kehinde, 2006); women are marginalized and deprived certain privileges that men enjoy (Parpart, 1986). Hence, patriarchy fosters tyranny, injustice, inequality, subjectification of the male gender and objectification of the female gender.

As reported on the world population review website accurate statistics on rape are notoriously difficult to obtain since most victims of sexual violence choose not to report it in order to forestall embarrassment, stigmatization, reprisal attack from the rapist, and so forth. Hence, GBV is grossly underreported in many countries, especially in Nigeria. The world population review website further reports that:

> approximately 35% of women worldwide have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime. However, in most countries with data available on rape (including the U.S.), fewer than 40% of those women seek help—and fewer than 10% seek assistance from law enforcement. As a result, most rapists escape punishment. In the U.S., for instance, it is estimated that only 9% of rapists are prosecuted, and only 3% spend time in prison. 97% of rapists walk free.

The issue of rape in Nigeria, according to the United Nations, has taken a worrisome dimension. Yet, statistics on GBV in Nigeria is hard to obtain. According to the United Nations (UN), as reported in the *Punch* newspaper of November 17, 2020, the spate of GBV in Nigeria, during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, is estimated at over 3,600 rape cases nationwide. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) states that 2,279 cases of rape and indecent assault were reported to the police in 2017, while the Nigerian Correctional Service said 4,436 people were jailed for sex-related crimes in 2014. According to Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Dame Pauline Tallen, as contested on the website of International Centre for Investigative Reporting on December 3, 2019, two (2) million Nigerians are raped every year, but there is no reliable public data to support or disprove this claim. Similarly, in 2011, a human rights lawyer, Caroline Ajie, also claimed that "at least 2 million Nigerian girls experience sexual abuse annually and that only 28 per cent of rape cases are reported" (The African Report). While the current study doubts the correctness of the two million figures, it aligns with the view that Nigeria is one of the countries with the highest cases of rape in the world. There is hardly a day that such reports are not covered in newspapers. The challenge, however, in Nigeria is that data sources on GBV cases are hard to come by. Corroborating the view that Nigeria lacks actual statistics of rape cases, the UN promised to cooperate with the Ministry of Women Affairs to strengthen the availability of data on violence against women

and girls. In the November 17, 2020 report by Punch, "the main existing data sources are fragmented with poor coordination of the data collection process, often lack disaggregated data for vulnerable groups and disaggregation beyond state level, have small samples and are not widely disseminated" (Author? Or Punch, 2020, p. ??)

Studies on rape have established that both male and female can be victims of rape (Benedict, 1993; Smith, 2004; Agaba, 2013; Oduah, 2014). Becoming a victim of rape is not gender-specific; however, females as rape victims are more reported in newspapers and even more studied than males as rape victims. The several reasons alluded to this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study; nevertheless, this study focuses specifically on the female rape victims (hereafter, FRVs), especially as represented by the media. Both the media and the law usually report rape issues. Benedict (1993) maintains that both agencies do very little to support FRVs who consequently "become trapped in a cycle of injustice: having fallen victim to a violent crime through no fault of their own, they are blamed for it, sometimes mocked for it by neighbors, friends, family, and the law" (p. 5). This scenario can be extended as being representative of the universal attitude against FRVs. In Nigeria, Chiazor et.al (2016) submits that 90% of victims of rape are female, and "they are usually ashamed, humiliated, afraid, and there is little or no law to protect them. Even the law enforcement officers that are meant to protect these victims also assault them in different ways, even sexually" (p. 7765)

The foregoing aptly demonstrates the unpalatable climate in which females live their lives. It can be submitted that their lives are constantly on the margin in such climates. Apart from the issues of their vulnerability to sexual predators, it appears there is no institutional support to secure them or get justice for them in cases of sexual violations. There is no doubt that neither the media nor the law provides safe haven for the female folks in a patriarchal society. Following other studies such as Ehrlich (2001) who argued that rape trials are often problematic because they engender re-victimization of FRVs, this study analyses the linguistic tools deployed in the reports in selected Nigerian newspapers with a view to identifying how FRVs are represented.

1.1. Language, gender and social relation in Nigeria

Gender and sex have been given different conceptualizations by scholars in feminist linguistics and literature. While gender is a socially constructed phenomenon, sex is a biologically constructed one. However, gender relations and practices in patriarchal society, like Nigeria, are often frequently disputed. This dispute keeps the field of language and gender interesting to scholars. A common issue that has enjoyed attention from scholars is the way language functions as a major means for subjugation of women (Lakoff, 1975; Spender, 1980; Cameron, 1992). The recurring finding from these studies is that language creates and sustains gender inequalities and

there is a need for linguistic change that will necessitate social change (Litosseliti, 2006; Lazar, 2007).

Besides the various traditional proverbs about gender (Yusuf, 1995; 1997; Arua & Yusuf, 2010), a clear indication of how language is often deployed to sustain gender inequalities is the representation of women in newspaper, especially when they are victims of any form of violence against women (VAW) such as rape. It has been revealed by previous research that there is a great variability in the representation of men and women, and such variability often favors women and disfavors men. To confirm this, studies (like Eshiet, 2013) on the use of gendered English expression in Nigerian newspapers have found out that Nigerian newspapers still portray high degree of the use of gender-bias expressions. Although feminist scholars have stated that gender relation varies according to time and space, it has been observed that the nature of social relation in Nigeria operates along the biological categorization of male and female, and it is "based on hierarchical relation of domination and subordination respectively" (Lazar 2005, p. 7). The relation of dominance and subordination is continually reinforced and justified by institutional instruments of patriarchy such as customary laws, religion and cultural practices, and even the media. Recurring gender issues that have been emerging from this form of social relation are repressive male domination, widespread domestic violence where females are victims, negative mental health for women, constant sexual assault, among others. It is in this vein that this study seeks to explore indications of gender bias in Nigerian newspapers' reports in relation to gender issues in general and representation of FRVs in particular.

1.2. Gender issues in Nigerian newspapers

Gender issues are a recurrent feature in Nigerian newspapers. This can be attributed to two factors: women being integral social actors (Santaemilia & Maruenda, 2014) in the Nigerian society, and Nigerian society being intensively patriarchal. Women are social actors in Nigerian society because they are cherished symbols of care, tenderness and compassion, and issues about them in the newspaper usually stir up emotion in the readers (Dare, 2016). The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society is evident in the unequal distribution of socio-political and economic benefits between male and female. Hence, it is not erroneous to conclude that there is reciprocal influence between these two factors. In a clear term, the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society makes women social actors in the Nigerian society because women are usually the victims of patriarchal practices.

Violence against women (VAW) is a recurring gender issue in every androcentric society and it hardly goes unnoticed by the media. The UN defines it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"

(World Bank, 2019, p 1). Thus, it entails violent circumstances where females are the victims. It involves instances of family violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment, some of which have led to cases of divorce between couples... and common gender issues in Nigerian newspapers are domestic violence, divorce and rape (Osisanwo & Oluwayemi, 2018). As maintained earlier, victims of rape can be male or female. However, there are different dimensions of rape with female as the victim: rape as a revenge for female refusal of male sexual advances, rape as a tool to satisfy male sexual urge, rape as an expression of misogyny and so on. Each of these dimensions often features in Nigerian newspapers' reports on rape. However, reporting rape cases places a heavy responsibility on these newspapers with respect to representation of women; words must be carefully selected to forestall any accusation of sexism. "The Nigerian journalist is extremely sensitive to feminine issues and seizes every opportunity to convey 'something' of significance about women" (Dare 2016, p. 317). Therefore, the linguistic framing of gender issues by the media has insidious power to sustain social inequality and injustice that feminist critical discourse analysts disapprove of. It is in recognition of the gender issues raised above that this study sets out to critically investigate and analyze how female victims of rape are constructed by Nigerian newspapers in their news reports on rape.

1.3.   Rape discourse

Discourse analysis is a term which accounts for a variety of methods for studying how language is used in text and contexts (Gee, 2010). Thus, the use of language in the context of rape is rape discourse. Rape discourse, then, is one of the domains of discourse studies, and it is theoretically situated among the common issues in gender discourse. It is conceptually different from rape which is one of the domains of gender studies. However, gender discourse and gender studies are intrinsically associated. More specifically, rape discourse is concerned with the use of language in the discussion of rape. It is concerned with how language is used to describe and discuss rape myths, rape victims, perpetrators and circumstances of rape. Rape myths are stereotyped beliefs about rape, rape victims and the perpetrators. Donaldson (2017), in agreement with Payne et al (1999), lists seven types of female rape myths: "that the woman was asking for it, it was not really rape, he did not mean to rape her, she wanted it, she is a liar, rape is a trivial event and rape is a deviant event" (p. 3). In sum, rape myths are stories that usually lead to victim-blaming and give a narrower understanding of rape. They are "general stereotypic beliefs that exonerate rapists and blame victims of sexual violence" (Bohner 2001, p. 515). Studies in rape discourse are often quick to implicate the media in the propagation and reinforcement of rape myths. This is because "the constant reporting of stereotypical rapes also negatively influences the general public's opinion" (Donaldson 2017, p. 5).

Rape discourse also involves linguistic discussion and description of rape victims. In this regard, particular attention is often focused on how language is used to

describe FRVs. The core belief shared by studies in this regard is that language has constitutive roles which "may exert hidden power in the way we talk and write about the fact that a man rapes a woman" (Bohner 2001, p. 515). Passivation is often used as a linguistic strategy in the descriptions of FRVs and their responsibilities. Bohner (2001) rightly observes that "the 'get'-passive seems to be especially well suited to suggest direct responsibility of the victim. The sentence 'the woman got raped', for example, may invoke the completion 'got herself raped' and may thus indicate the woman's active participation" (p. 517). The present study is another attempt on the examination of the linguistic description of FRVs.

1.4. Problem Statement

Representation of gender issues within and without media reportage of gender-based violence, sexual violence and domestic violence has been given attention by existing studies beyond the Nigerian space (Berns, 2017; Herrera, 2017; Lumsden & Morgan, 2017; Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2018; Eaton, 2019; Quinn, Prendergast, Galvin. 2019; Royal, 2019; Schwark & Bohner, 2019; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021; Prendergast & Quinn, 2021). Similarly, representation practices and gender issues in Nigerian newspapers have been studied extensively by scholars using different ideological perspectives. Representational practices such as ideology and power have been examined by, Osisanwo (2011, 2016) and Oyeleye & Osisanwo (2013) while various gender issues such as gendered language, sexist language, and homosexuality have been examined by Eshiet (2013), Animasahun (2015), Okon et.al (2018), Ahmed (2018), Osisanwo & Ajibade (2019, 2020) among others. In spite of these works, not much critical investigation on the linguistic tools often used to represent FRVs in Nigerian newspapers appears to have been done. This is a gap that this study intends to fill. Oduah (2014) and Nwabueze & Oduah (2015) are two studies that are closely related works to this gap. However, they used non-linguistic approach to examine framing and coverage of rape cases in Nigerian dailies; they did not specifically examine how FRVs are linguistically represented in the dailies. Therefore, this study focuses on how, within the Nigerian context, FRVs are linguistically represented in 40 news reports from *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*. The following questions guided the operation of this paper.

i.   What linguistic tools are deployed in selected Nigerian Newspapers to construct news reports on rape?
ii. In what ways do the deployed linguistic tools influence the construction of FRVs in the reports?
iii. To what extent have the underlying gender biases in the selected Nigerian newspapers' conditioned the reports on rape?

2.   METHODOLOGY

2.1.   Analytic Framework

The analysis in this paper is guided by insights from Lazar's (2005) notion of feminist critical discourse analysis and Halliday's (1994) transitivity aspect of systemic functional linguistics. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) is a complementary field of feminist linguistics and an approach to discourse analysis which combines feminism and tenets of critical discourse analysis. Popularized by Michelle M. Lazar in 2005 and 2007, the central concern of FCDA is "critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systemically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude and disempower women as a social group" (Lazar 2007, p. 5). Thus, it is a subfield of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which "theorize and analyze from a critical feminist perspective the particularly insidious and oppressive nature of gender as an omni-relevant category in most social practices" (Lazar 2007, p. 3). Following the prime concern of FCDA as outlined above, its aim as Lazar (2007) explains "is to show up the complex, subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle way in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated and challenged in different contexts and communities" (p. 142). Through this, gender-sensitive practices and assumptions which are often implicitly or explicitly enacted in different discourses but are often glossed over by mainstream CDA will be sufficiently interrogated by FCDA. Thus, the "actual material and phenomenological consequences" of these practices and assumptions "for groups of women and women in specific societies" (Lazar 2007, p. 2) will be justifiably revealed. As further revealed by Lazar (2007), "this entails mobilizing theory in order to create critical awareness and develop feminist strategies for resistance and change" (p. 6). To sum it all, findings from feminist linguistics/FCDA are not made for mere face value but are ultimately aimed at engendering social transformation of the fate of women (Lazar, 2005; Litosseliti, 2006). In this vein, there are high expectations that findings of this study will necessitate the long-needed change in the way linguistic resources are deployed by Nigerian newspapers to represent FRVs. Data for analysis for FCDA includes multifaceted instances where representations in text and talk are formed from particular perspectives with the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance between men and women (Lazar 2007, p. 6). Thus, "the analysis of data includes meanings expressed overtly; it is especially attentive to the less obvious, nuanced and implicit meanings for the subtle and complex renderings of ideological assumptions and power relations in contemporary societies" (Lazar 2007, p. 13). And following Lazar's (2007) charge that "the task of feminist CDA is to examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or resisted in a variety of ways through textual representation of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk" (p. 10), the analysis of the data for this study will

focus on both social and linguistic aspects of representation of FRVs in the selected Nigerian newspapers. The overall analysis was conducted on the basis of discursive analysis made by the text producers of the selected texts. For clarity of analysis, Halliday's transitivity system was used to identify the formal linguistic properties of the selected news reports. This effort is in consonance with the first level of analysis postulated in Fairclough's CDA (Fairclough 1995), which was built upon in the FCDA. For the critical explanation of the social implications of the linguistic choices and the uncovering of underlying gender bias in the texts, feminist critical discourse analysis was used.

2.2.   Data collection

Data for the study were sourced from the online archives of four widely circulated Nigerian national newspapers: *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *Daily Trust*. Specifically, the data were news items on rape that were reported by these national dailies between January 2020 and December 2020. The period covers the months of national lockdown declared by the Federal Government of Nigeria in response to Covid-19. During these months, there was spike in the rate of rape reports and other domestic abuse in the country. Purposive sampling method was adopted to collect data from the online archives of these newspapers, where a total of 40 news items were selected. Seventeen representative texts are used in the analysis. The quantitative and qualitative analytical procedures are combined in this study. For the quantitative aspect of the analysis, Voyant Tools, a web-based text reading and analysis environment, is deployed to facilitate reading and interpretive practices for digital humanities-based studies, like the current one. In this paper, retrieved news stories on rape cases were culled out of the selected newspapers. The 10,234-word corpus with 790 unique word forms, which generated 0.077 vocabulary density and 40.5 average words per sentence, were run using Voyant Tools in order to generate the statistical information on the word cloud in the reportage. The word cloud analysis helps to identify the thematic foci in the retrieved data. The qualitative aspect of the analysis was guided by insights from Lazar's (2005) notion of feminist critical discourse analysis and Halliday's transitivity system. The quantitative and qualitative tools provide a unified framework through which the analysis proceeds consistently and rhythmically.

3.   ANALYSIS

The analysis revealed that the selected Nigerian newspapers deployed Halliday's material, relational, behavioral, verbal and existential processes along with their participants and circumstances as linguistic tools to represent FRVs in different ways in their news reports on rape. Ultimately, five major representations emerge in the news stories: FRVs as patriarchal preys, object of sexual gratification, anonymized

and pseudonymized victims, objects of pity and victims of dual jeopardy. The word cloud analysis, as presented in Figure 1, helps to identify the thematic foci in the retrieved data, giving the statistical details on the preponderance of word choice. Figure 1 gives sufficient word representation to call readers' attention to the reported news item. The reported news item here is rape. Other words which corroborate this are raped, raping, rape, girl, victim and so forth.

Figure 1: The word cloud analysis on news reports on rape

3.1.   Female rape victims as patriarchal preys

The arrangement of discursive choices by the text producers especially material and relational processes as well as their participants and circumstances in texts 1 – 2 indicates that FRVs are represented as patriarchal preys. Patriarchal prey is conceived in this study to mean the consistent subjugation of women by patriarchal practices – practices to support masculine recognition and dominance over feminine. Sexual assault, which often manifests as rape in the main patriarchal practice in this representation, is often perpetrated through tools such as force, luring, deception and blackmailing. This representation shows that the text producers further enacted the gender bias against women as a physically disadvantaged social group in the face of prevailing patriarchal practices.

   Material process involves the use of action verb which shows a participant (the actor) doing something to another participant (goal) in the same clause. In the sampled texts, the female victims are linguistically represented as goals in the clauses. Goals in this transitivity framework are sufferers of actions of the actors in the clause. Representing the victims as goals in these clauses indicates that they are negatively affected by the action of the actors. They are usually "constructed as being impacted by the actor's performance of the process" (Halliday and Matthiessen,

2014:334). In addition, goals do not remain the same after being impacted on by the actors. This feature distinguishes goals from scopes which often remain unaffected after the actions of the actors. This change in the state of the goals after undergoing actions of the actors can be related to the physical distress and psychological trauma rape victims often have to cope with after suffering rape from male perpetrators. Figure 2, called Context in Voyant Tools environment, displays the connection between the rape and the rapist. In the context of the representations, the words 'rape' and 'raped' are the material process action verbs which show the relationship between the actor and the goal. While words and phrases like 'gang', 'men', 'male students' represented the masculine figures who carried out the act, other words and phrases like 'married woman', '12-year-old girl', 'her', 'girl' represented the feminine figures as goals. The representations constructed using either the active or passive voice uses the victimhood to womanhood strategy to implicate the female gender as patriarchal prey to the male gender, which either way privileges the men as a social group who physically subverts the female gender.
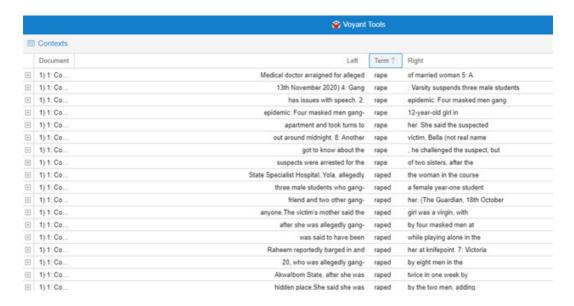

Document	Left	Term ↑	Right
1) 1: Co...	Medical doctor arraigned for alleged	rape	of married woman 5: A
1) 1: Co...	13th November 2020) 4: Gang	rape	: Varsity suspends three male students
1) 1: Co...	has issues with speech. 2:	rape	epidemic: Four masked men gang
1) 1: Co...	epidemic: Four masked men gang-	rape	12-year-old girl in
1) 1: Co...	apartment and took turns to	rape	her. She said the suspected
1) 1: Co...	out around midnight. 8: Another	rape	victim, Bella (not real name
1) 1: Co...	got to know about the	rape	, he challenged the suspect, but
1) 1: Co...	suspects were arrested for the	rape	of two sisters, after the
1) 1: Co...	State Specialist Hospital, Yola, allegedly	raped	the woman in the course
1) 1: Co...	three male students who gang-	raped	a female year-one student
1) 1: Co...	friend and two other gang-	raped	her. (The Guardian, 18th October
1) 1: Co...	anyone. The victim's mother said the	raped	girl was a virgin, with
1) 1: Co...	after she was allegedly gang-	raped	by four masked men at
1) 1: Co...	was said to have been	raped	while playing alone in the
1) 1: Co...	Raheem reportedly barged in and	raped	her at knifepoint. 7: Victoria
1) 1: Co...	20, who was allegedly gang-	raped	by eight men in the
1) 1: Co...	Akwaibom State, after she was	raped	twice in one week by
1) 1: Co...	hidden place. She said she was	raped	by the two men, adding

Figure 2 – Connection between the rape and the rapist

Texts 1 and 2 further exemplify this representation.

> **Text 1: Cobbler rapes graduate, shares nude video with friends**
> A 25-year-old cobbler, Olamide Babayemi, has been arrested for raping a 22-year-old Microbiology graduate and sharing the victim's nude video with his friends. Babayemi was alleged to have invited the victim, whom he claimed was his girlfriend, to come and collect the phone she asked him to

buy in Mowe, Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area of Ogun State. (*The Punch*, 13 January, 2020)

Text 2: Welder Nabbed in Ondo for Allegedly Defiling 2 Daughters
The Ondo State Commandant of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), on Sunday, announced that operatives of the command had arrested a welder, Femi Onifade, for allegedly defiling his two daughters. He said that Onifade, 48, defiled his two daughters, aged six and nine years. (*Daily Trust*, 24 May, 2020)

The actor is usually the subject that operates on itself or others which can be animate or inanimate. In texts 1 and 2, material process is used to represent FRVs 'a 22-year-old Microbiology graduate' in text 1 and 'two daughters' in text 2 as goals of the actions of the actors. Both 'a 22-year-old Microbiology graduate' and 'two daughters' are represented as FRVs who suffer the actions performed by the actors, while 'a welder, Femi Onifade' in text 1 and '25-year-old cobbler, Olamide Babayemi' in text 2 are the male rapists who are the performers of the action. Thus, FRVs are socially framed as preys in the texts. As preys, they are constantly susceptible to attenuating patriarchal practices that are constantly bent on harming them. Thus, it confirms the gender bias that they are sexual objects which are open to patriarchal practices such as sexual assault. This representation is generic to every text in our data corpus where material process manifests.

Figure 3 – Masculine influence in rape

Figure 3 further depicts masculine activity in female rape, and this also incriminates the masculine gender as perpetrators of the dehumanization of the female gender, while it associates the feminine gender with prey. The consistent repetition of men as the active agent behind the rape further underscores patriarchal dominance of women. Expressions such as 'four masked MEN gang-rape...,' 'allegedly gang-raped by eight MEN in the Akoko-Edo...,' 'when eight MEN swooped on her, forced her,'

and 'was raped by the two MEN adding that after the …' further accentuates the victimhood of womanhood with manhood.

A correspondingly similar representation which further depicts FRVs as patriarchal preys is the description of FRVs as helpless and defenseless sufferers. In essence, FRVs are humans who are violated, subjected to suffering, usually against their wish. Defenseless humans often lack the physical strength and power required to protect themselves from physical, and in this sense, sexual attack. Material, verbal and existential processes were deployed in our data as linguistic tools used by text producers to represent FRVs. The emerging representation from the combination of these processes as explicated in texts 3 and 4 is that FRVs are defenseless sufferers; and this confirms the gender biases that females are inferior and powerless beings who suffer sexual assault from their male counterparts as a result of patriarchal practices, as exemplified in texts 3 and 4.

> **Text 3: Man nabbed for allegedly raping daughter, stepdaughter in Ogun**
> A 48-year-old man, simply identified as Akile, has been arrested by neighbours for allegedly raping his daughter and a 14-year-old stepdaughter (names withheld) in his residence at Elere, ItoriEwekoro Local Government Area of Ogun State. The suspect's daughter, who confirmed the rape, said: "My father usually threatens us with a knife that if we tell anybody, he will kill us." Also, a medical test carried out on the stepdaughter confirmed she had been abused for a long time. (*The Guardian*, 11 December, 2020)

> **Text 4: I was violently attacked, raped by our family driver, woman tells court**
> A 23-year-old woman (name withheld) on Tuesday at an Ikeja Special Offences Court, said that she was violently attacked and raped as a teenager by one Francis Apai, a 33-year-old driver to her family. The witness said that he forcefully undressed her, undressed himself and continually punched, strangled her and raped her. She told the court that she had tried escaping from her attacker but could not. The father said that there were bruises all over his daughter's body which were allegedly inflicted by Apai during the attack. (*Vanguard*, 7 January, 2020)

The material processes are deployed to indicate the action of the actor on the goal. The use of verbs such as 'threaten, kill, attack, punched, strangled, armed' in texts 3 and 4 represent the action of the male rapists on the FRVs which lays credence to the representation of FRVs as defenseless and helpless preys to their male counterparts, due to the masculine strength which often renders an average female defenseless and powerless. Even where some males may not be so powerful, they are armed for

the sexual battle since the attack is often planned. Hence, FRVs are socially framed as inferior beings in the texts. The patriarchal society has made females of different ages susceptible to rape attacks from libidinous men. The social implication of this representation is that FRVs are defenseless against patriarchal practices such as incest and sexual assault. It also brings to the fore the gender biases that females are inferior beings and defenseless sexual objects. The social implication of the involvement of daughter in text 3 highlights the animalistic tendencies in male-rapists who for sexual pleasure normalize the patriarchal practice of incest and sexual assault; thus, projecting a picture of sexual assault on victims and the defenselessness of the victims.

3.2. Female rape victims as objects of sexual gratification

The representations in the news stories and the discursive choices also indicate that the male gender use the female gender as objects of sexual gratification. Sexual gratification is conceived in this paper as sexual pleasure. The representation views men as people in vantage position because they are more advanced in age and strength and perceive their victims as powerless objects. Such men see their victims as worthless beings or objects who could be used for sexual pleasure at their own will, that is for their enjoyment. This is another way that the female gender is subjugated, dominated, trampled upon, relegated and perceived as omni-relevant, provided the needs of the men in question are met. The consistent subjugation of women by patriarchal practices as objects of sexual assault for sexual satisfaction against the will of the females often manifests in rape reports in Nigerian newspapers as evident in texts 5-6.

> **Text 5: Court remands trader for allegedly raping seven-year-old girl**
> An Ikeja Magistrates' Court in Lagos yesterday ordered that a 44-year-old trader, Seye Garuba, who allegedly raped a seven-year-old girl, be remanded in a Correctional Centre. He said the defendant unlawfully had sexual intercourse with his neighbour's daughter. (*The Guardian* ,16 December, 2020)

> **Text 6:**
> The police also paraded a 46-year-old Umar Mohammed in Azare town of Bauchi State who used N50 note to lure his mentally ill 15-year-old daughter into her mother's room where he raped her. (*Daily Trust*, 23 September, 2020)

> **Text 7: Man, 29, arrested for allegedly defiling Down syndrome minor**
> The Police in Oyo State have arrested one Timothy Abijo, 29, for allegedly defiling a 13-year-old minor with Down syndrome. The suspect, who was on visitation to his cousin, residing in the same house as the victim was alleged to have lured the girl with N500.The mother of the victim said that the suspect lured the girl into his host's room and gagged her before raping her.

> Abijo was alleged to have given the minor N500 after warning her not to tell anyone. The victim's mother said the raped girl was a virgin, with Down syndrome, which implies that she has special needs, and also has issues with speech. (*Vanguard*, 17 April, 2020)

The active agents behind the inhuman action of rape in texts 5, 6 and 7 are 'a 44-year-old trader, Seye Garuba', 'a 46-year-old Umar Mohammed' and 'Timothy Abijo, 29' respectively.' On the other hand, the recipients who suffer the actions are 'neighbor's daughter' (text 5), 'his mentally ill 15-year-old daughter' (text 6), and 'a 13-year-old minor with Down syndrome' (text 7). The relational process, which is a process of being, often used to indicate the relationship between an entity and another entity, is used in describing the FRV in text 7. While the relationship in identifying clauses is reversible, it is irreversible in attributive clauses. Through the attributive clause of relational process in text 7, the female rape victim is represented as a person with special feature, that is, 'a virgin, with Down Syndrome'. Through this representation, the news report further accentuates the victim's helplessness and purity. The representations of the recipients or goals of the dastardly acts as daughter, mentally-ill daughter, minor, girl, underage, and so forth evince that the perpetrators often target easy-to-get, unhealthy, unsuspecting and possibly naïve young women as their objects of sexual gratification. The choice of the word 'daughter' in the text underlies that incest, the sexual relationship among blood relations, is one of the patriarchal practices for preying on women in androcentric society. It further confirms the bias that females, their age or relation to their assaulters notwithstanding, are sexual objects. In each of the reports, there is sufficient evidence of age gap between the male perpetrator and the female victim. The males are usually quite older than the females, thereby suggesting that such men prey on younger humans. The younger female humans are easily susceptible to attenuating patriarchal strength, while the men see them as almost inanimate objects used to satisfy their sexual urge. Thus, FRVs are socially framed as objects of sexual gratification; and confirm the gender bias that they are sexual objects which are open to patriarchal sexual assault.

	Voyant Tools			
Contexts				
	Document	Left	Term ↑	Right
⊞	1) 1: Co...	anytime they wanted to have	sex	with her, threatening to kill
⊞	1) 1: Co...	held my legs and had	sex	with me. I begged him
⊞	1) 1: Co...	the same age, to have	sex	with his sister against her
⊞	1) 1: Co...	for refusing to begin a	sexual	relationship with one of the
⊞	1) 1: Co...	said the defendant unlawfully had	sexual	intercourse with his neighbour's daughter
⊞	1) 1: Co...	absence to harass the minors	sexually	."It was revealed that few
⊞	1) 1: Co...	son of his neighbour and	sexually	assaulted. 20: Four other suspects

Figure 4 – representation of sex-related terms

Figure 4 further adduces masculine involvement in perceiving females as objects of sexual gratification through assault. The male-female power relations in the representations demonstrate power hierarchy, where men are portrayed to possess more physical power than women. This is what is relied upon in the subjugation of their female counterpart as their object of sex. The repetition of the words sex, sexual and sexually in figure 4 shows how the FRVs are portrayed as sex objects. Expressions such as 'they wanted to have SEX with her, threatening to kill her…', '…unlawfully had SEXUAL intercourse with his neighbor's daughter', and '…harass the minors SEXUALLY…' further heighten the objectification of womanhood in the hands of rapists, representing the view that the FRVs have no say or opinion on their 'pride'. They are often forced outside their wish to satisfy rapists who see them as their semen containing object. They see them as containers for offloading their excess fluid.

3.3. Female rape victims as anonymized and pseudonymized victims

Newspaper reports on women issues usually stir up emotional appeal in the readers. The identities of the victims are, therefore, often anonymized or pseudonymized. By anonymization, such identities are completely veiled or removed – not traceable; however, pseudonymized identities are often still identifiable through indirect and additional information. A close study of the representation of rape victims in our data present a curios finding – the protection of the victims' identities through substitution of their real names with fictitious names. The representation of FRVs in the newspapers, therefore, is traditionally expected to be done with modicum of compassion and secrecy. This is often in a bid to avoiding subjecting FRVs to re-victimization through the power of the media. The social implication of this strategy is the need to avoid double victimization of rape victims by veiling their true identity; thus, they are anonymized. The phrase 'not real name' in texts 8 and 9, and some others, exemplify this representation.

In all the texts in our data, the real identities of FRVs were anonymized through the adoption of pseudo name (texts 8 and 9), characterizing them (texts 8 and 9) or making reference to them just as rape victims (text 10 and Figure 5). The assumption behind this strategy is to minimize possible stigmatization and the shame the victims may suffer. Such veiling, therefore, often holds back the true identity of the victims. Furthermore, such strategy also demonstrates the moral responsibilities of the newspapers towards reporting violence against women. However, the only exception to this anonymization of FRVs is when dead rape victims are involved, as exemplified in text 13.

> **Text 8: Rape epidemic: Four masked men gang-rape 12-year-old girl in Lagos**
> A 12-year-old girl, Blessing (not real name), is said to be experiencing trauma after she was allegedly gang-raped by four masked men at her

residence in Abijo area of Ajah, Lagos State. She was said to have been raped while playing alone in the compound around 2pm on Thursday. Saturday PUNCH learnt that the victim, a secondary school pupil, was left bleeding from injuries she sustained in her private parts. When our correspondent called Anthonia back on Friday evening, the victim was said to be suffering from trauma and could not speak on the incident. (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020)

Text 9:
Another rape victim, Bella (not real name) has had to leave her home in Egor, Ikpoba-Okha Local Government Area of Edo State, for Uyo, AkwaIbom State, after she was raped twice in one week by men suspected to be cultists (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020)

The use of the names 'Blessing' in text 8 and 'Bella' in text 9 in place of the real identities of the FRVs attests to the social support that the feminine gender and rape victims, in general, often receive from newspapers. In texts 10 and 11, the characteristics of the FRVs were just used in describing them to the news consumers to ensure believability and substantiate that the victims are real humans and are females, using expressions such as 'nine-year-old girl' (text 10) and 'his sister' (text 11). The use of 'girl' and 'sister' creates a picture in the consumer's mind. However, for the sanity, ego and pride of the victims, their names are withheld.

Text 10:
Three men also in police net in Bauchi were accused of repeatedly gang-raping a nine-year-old girl inside a public toilet at a market in Gamawa Local Government Area of the state. They are: Abdullahi Adamu, 25, Abdullahi Abubakar 23, and Auwalu Haruna, 22- who all confessed upon arrest. (*Daily Trust*, 16 September, 2020)

Text 11:
In another incident, Mustapha Usman, 32, conspired with Dahiru Aliyu of the same age, to have sex with his sister against her wish in their car. (*Daily Trust*, 16 September, 2020)

Text 12:
The suspect was reported to have soaked the victim's clothes in water when she got to the agreed location and used his phone to record her nudeness before sending the video to some of his friends. The PPRO said the suspect also attempted to kill the victim after raping and filming her in a nude posture in order to cover up his crime. (*The Punch*, 13 January, 2020)

The third strategy through which anonymization is sustained in news reports on FRVs is through the use of the word 'victim' as naming strategy. For example, in text 10, the word 'victim' is used to represent the victim in question. In addition, words associated with victim are used up to 81 times, as shown in figure 5, in our data to further adduce to the reporters' intent to key into the moral responsibilities of preserving the victims' faces in their reports on violence against women. Hence, we have the use of expressions such as 'attempted to kill the victim,', 'the victim, 19...,' and 'sharing the victim's nude video.'

	Document	Left	Term ↑	Right
⊞	1) 1: Co...	alleged to have invited the	victim	, whom he claimed was his
⊞	1) 1: Co...	also attempted to kill the	victim	after raping and filming her
⊞	1) 1: Co...	alleged to have invited the	victim	, whom he claimed was his
⊞	1) 1: Co...	also attempted to kill the	victim	after raping and filming her
⊞	1) 1: Co...	the same house as the	victim	was alleged to have lured
⊞	1) 1: Co...	N500. The mother of the	victim	said that the suspect lured
⊞	1) 1: Co...	Saturday PUNCH learnt that the	victim	, a secondary school pupil, was
⊞	1) 1: Co...	back on Friday evening, the	victim	was said to be suffering
⊞	1) 1: Co...	around midnight. 8: Another rape	victim	, Bella (not real name) has
⊞	1) 1: Co...	men suspected to be cultists. The	victim	, 19, told Saturday PUNCH that
⊞	1) 1: Co...	that the suspect and the	victim	lived in the same compound
⊞	1) 1: Co...	have clocked 18." 11: The	victim	said after she returned from
⊞	1) 1: Co...	killed us, yet no justice –	victims	5: Some of the victims
⊞	1) 1: Co...	Victims 5: Some of the	victims	said they had yet to
⊞	1) 1: Co...	bitter experiences. Some of the	victims	, however, said their grief worsened
⊞	1) 1: Co...	police. 6: One of the	victims	, 16-year-old Bose Samuel
⊞	1) 1: Co...	me," she added. 13: The	victims	' father, who demanded justice, said
⊞	1) 1: Co...	Microbiology graduate and sharing the	victim's	nude video with his friends

Figure 5 – Anonymization of rape victims

> **Text 13: Example 14: How 13-Year-Old Girl Was Raped to Death in Lagos**
> A 24-year old man, Ajom Brimcewil Tabi, has been arrested for allegedly abducting and raping a 13-year old girl, Favour Ikechukwu to death in Ejigbo, Lagos State. It was gathered that Tabi carried out the act alongside his friends. The police said the suspect along with two others, now at large, gang-raped the girl in a room and left her to bleed to death. The body was found stark naked with blood flowing out of her private part. (*Daily Trust*, 5 October, 2020)

Text 13 exemplifies the earlier identified exception to this anonymization of FRVs. This is often considered not entirely offensive in the case of the death of the victim. In text 13, it was reported that the raped victim was 'a 13-year old girl, Favor Ikechukwu,' who was raped 'to death in Ejigbo, Lagos State.' Although there is no identity veiling, anonymization or pseudonymization in the report since the victim is dead; however, there is the need to be socially responsible to the victim's family,

who are believed to have suffered a man-induced and avoidable death. The unprecedented emanating shame and stigmatization often affect the family members and friends. This can, thus, be seen as family-relegation, relatives-victimization and associates-victimhood.

3.4. Female rape victims as object of pity

Female rape victims are represented as objects of pity using different processes in the reportage. As noted earlier, women are cherished symbols of care, tenderness and compassion, and issues about them in the newspaper usually stir up emotional reactions in the readers (Dare, 2016). The text producers used these linguistic tools to strategically evoke pity in the reader when reading about FRVs. However, the representation allows the identification of a gender bias that females are emotional being. (see KAFA 2010; Rached, Hankir & Zaman, 2021). And the social implication of this bias is that mental abuse is a major patriarchal practice. Rape experience often leaves huge mental trail on the victims. In the description of the victims, the reporters often deploy the attributive and identifier strands of relational process in order to give appropriate representation of the victims so as to evoke pity in the reader by showing the special features of the rape victims. This process is strategically deployed to show the callousness of the rapist to the readers. A closer look at texts 14 and 15, for example, shows the helplessness of the victims in the hands of their rapists. The description of the victim's special attributes is mentioned to draw sympathy from the readers that despite their innocence (the virginity), disability (down syndrome) and age (13-year-old minor/ three-year-old child), they still underwent the harrowing experience of rape. The combination of the identified linguistic process alongside their participants and circumstance projects a representation of FRVs as objects of pity. Recurring themes in the texts are the different ages of the victims, their special biological and physical features, the duration and the aftermaths of their ordeal. Such features often evoke pity on the FRVs whose conditions show they possess observable behavioral and physiological emotional components.

> **Text 14: Man, 29, arrested for allegedly defiling Down syndrome minor**
> The Police in Oyo State have arrested one Timothy Abijo, 29, for allegedly defiling a 13-year-old minor with Down syndrome. The suspect, who was on visitation to his cousin, residing in the same house as the victim was alleged to have lured the girl with N500. The mother of the victim said that the suspect lured the girl into his host's room and gagged her before raping her. Abijo was alleged to have given the minor N500 after warning her not to tell anyone. The victim's mother said the raped girl was a virgin, with Down syndrome, which implies that she has special needs, and also has issues with speech. (*Vanguard*, 17 April, 2020)

Text 15: Man arrested for defiling 3yr old girl
A 23-year-old man, old Badmus Quadri, has been arrested for defiling one of his neighbours three-year-old child in Owode community, Ogun State. However, on arrival, she noticed blood in her vagina and upon interrogation, her child mentioned the suspect's name and describes how he allegedly defiled her in his room. (*Vanguard*, 12 June, 2020)

The representation suggests the level of moral decadence in the society the victims find themselves. This decadence is indicative of the fact that feminine ability or disability does not preclude them from being devoured by male devourers. This kind of representation desires certain expectations from the readers to acknowledge the victims as subordinated entity which deserve pity. Such representations pose to evoke pity in the readers towards the victims. Thus, the representation produces a more persuasive insight into the complex and distressing place females are given in a patriarchal society like Nigeria. Females in Nigeria are thought of as second-class citizens who must operate under the jackboot of their male counterparts who are the de-facto master (see Emecheta 1989). It goes without saying that their lives in such patriarchal atmosphere will definitely evoke pity in the mind of the outsiders because it portrays them as victims of circumstance. However, Talbot (2007) cautions that "if women increasingly view themselves as victims through the lens of the oppressors and allow themselves to be viewed that way by others, they become enfeebled and miserable" (p. 167).

3.5.   Female rape victims as victims of dual jeopardy

Female rape victims are also represented as victims of dual jeopardy in the reportage. Since the FRVs had suffered sexual violation, serving a timely justice to punish their violators would have given them some form of succor. The reportage casts aspersion on the judiciary system which characterizes rape evidence as something which supports the patriarchal urge to fester the inhumane action. This is due to the fact that justice for the raped often lasts over a protracted period, if not an entirely difficult thing to get. The expression, 'some of the victims, however, said their grief worsened when they did not get justice after reporting to the police' (text 16) and 'one of the victims, ... has seemingly lost hope in getting justice six months after she was allegedly defiled ...' (text 17) from the victim's account lay credence to the representation of suffering double jeopardy as a result of no justice.

Text 16: Example 3: How rapists choked, nearly killed us, yet no justice – Victims
Some of the victims said they had yet to heal from their grief, saying they were subjected to untold trauma following their bitter experiences. Some

of the victims, however, said their grief worsened when they did not get justice after reporting to the police (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020).

Text 17:
One of the victims, 16-year-old Bose Samuel (not real name), has seemingly lost hope in getting justice six months after she was allegedly defiled by her neighbour, one MakindeRaheem. The girl was having a bath in one of the two bathrooms in her residence in the Oko Oba area of Lagos when Raheem reportedly barged in and raped her at knifepoint (*The Punch*, 6 June, 2020).

Document	Left	Term ↑	Right
1) 1: Co...	nearly killed us, yet no	justice	– Victims 5: Some of the
1) 1: Co...	when they did not get	justice	after reporting to the police
1) 1: Co...	seemingly lost hope in getting	justice	six months after she was
1) 1: Co...	The victims' father, who demanded	justice	, said when he got to
1) 1: Co...	the devil's work. I want	justice	because my daughter is traumatised

Figure 6 – representation of justice

Figure 6 also adduces that the Nigerian judicial system seemingly slams rape victims with double jeopardy. This suggests the need for an overhaul of the criminal code on rape cases. Such judicial delays or denials have the tendency to increase victims' traumatic experiences and hopelessness in their country, which may seem to have privileged patriarchy on all sides, seem to continue the subjugation of the feminine gender, raping them of the much desired justice. The repetition of the word 'justice' in figure 6 shows how the FRVs are portrayed. Expressions such as 'nearly killed us, yet no JUSTICE – victims,' 'when they did not get JUSTICE after reporting…,' and '…lost hope in getting JUSTICE six months after …' further accentuate the victimization of womanhood both in the hands of rapists and the judicial system, thereby heightening stigmatization. Rape victims hardly summon courage to report rape cases. When the few that summon courage to do so, thereby self-revealing their identities, are even denied, then the justice system, government or society has collaborated with rapists to rape the victims again, subjecting them to dual jeopardy or secondary victimization. Therefore, FRVs are raped physically, mentally and judicially. Again, the representation also advocates the level of dehumanization and decadence that the society and the state have ignorantly reduced womanhood to. Hence, this is in agreement with Benedict's (1993:5) claim that FRVs consequently "become trapped in a cycle of injustice: having fallen victim to a violent crime through no fault of their own…"

4.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall analysis has been conducted on the basis of linguistic choices made by the text producers, the gender biases enacted in the texts and the emerging socio-cultural assumptions. With insights from Halliday's transitivity system used in explaining the linguistic properties and Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis used in examining the socio-cultural assumptions enacted through identified linguistic tools, excerpts revealed that the selected Nigerian newspapers are imbued with representing FRVs as patriarchal preys, object of sexual gratification, anonymized and pseudonymized victims, objects of pity and victims of dual jeopardy. The men-rapists carry out their inhumane actions and the dehumanization of the feminine gender by sexually violating powerless women, underage girls, mentally retarded and physically challenged females and unsuspecting girls. The findings revealed that material, relational, verbal, behavioral and existential processes are the linguistic tools that are deployed by Nigerian newspapers in the representation of female victims in their rape news reports. The newspaper reports constantly used material process to represent the female rape victims as goals. Goals in transitivity system are sufferers of the actions of the actor in clauses in material process. Relational, verbal, behavioral and existential processes are used to show possession of certain features. Relational and existential processes are specifically deployed in the news reports to indicate the outstanding features that are possessed by the female rape victims. The transitivity processes along their respective participants and circumstances as identified in the analysis, and the actor-goal rendition portray FRVs as preys, who are constantly susceptible to attenuating patriarchal practices, thus confirming the gender bias that women are sexual objects which are open to patriarchal practices such as sexual assault; thus, accentuating the victimhood of womanhood. The social implications of these representations align with patriarchal practices such as androcentrism, incest, mental abuse and sexual assault while the gender biases implicated in the representation included the projection of FRVs as inferior beings, powerless ones and emotional beings.

   Some of the representations align with existing studies, for example, Worell (2002) which submits that media's representation of relationship is that women are usually being portrayed in submissive positions to men. This portrayal rids women of their dignity and right to self. Their wishes and wants are subject to acceptance or refutation by men. They are subverted, coerced and forced to satisfy the men, who deny them any self-right. This is further corroborated by Wood (2008) who avers that women are sex objects for men's pleasure. The findings align with Chiazor et.al (2016) who submit that 90% of victims of rape are female, and they "are usually ashamed, humiliated, afraid, and there is little or no law to protect them. Even the law enforcement officers that are meant to protect these victims also assault them in different ways, even sexually" (p. 7765).

   Rather than creating a society which balances the perception of both genders,

where one is not superior or inferior to the other, but seen as complementing the other, patriarchal society has consistently encouraged women to take the back seat, encouraging them to develop some qualities like beauty, sexiness, passivity, and powerlessness in order to meet cultural ideals of femininity (Wood, 2008); and this has contributed to objectifying and dehumanizing them. The development of only those qualities has continued to put men in the vantage position of preying on women, and subjecting them to sexual aggression since the qualities that are linked to abuse of women (aggressiveness, sexuality, and strength) are the same qualities that men are urged to exemplify (Wood, 2008). Women in the hands of men, therefore, continue to be subjected to violent imagery (Worell, 2002). Thus, the issues of sexual dominance due to powerlessness by the feminine gender; subversion and subjection to sexual object for masculine sexual gratification and so forth, and the continued reportage of such in newspaper reports with delayed or denied justice in case where law suits are engaged seem to continue to empower and encourage patriarchal and feminine relegation, while the FRVs are practically re-victimized. Hence, Ehrlich (2001) argues that rape trials are often problematic because they engender re-victimization of FRVs. In addition, the space allotted to the report seems to continue to empower rapists' rampage. Therefore, contrary to the claim by (Dare, 2016) that "the Nigerian journalist is extremely sensitive to feminine issues and seizes every opportunity to convey 'something' of significance about women" (p. 317), and in agreement with the advocacy by feminist critical discourse analysts, the linguistic framing of gender issues and slant reportage of rape by the media has continued to put men at more vantage position over women, thereby sustaining social inequality and injustice.

Findings from this study will be of great benefit to scholars and media analysts on the various linguistic features that are often deployed by Nigerian newspapers to frame female rape victims. It hopes to stimulate the linguistic change that will engender the social change in the circumstances of female lives that feminist linguists have long been canvassing. It will benefit media discourse analysts, feminist critical discourse analysts, gender advocate groups and newspaper reporters among others because rape is a sensitive issue that needs to be discussed with utmost care. Violence against women is a feature that often evidences the place of women in patriarchal society. This study joined existing body of knowledge on spate of gender-based violence in Nigeria, albeit, through a critical examination of representation practices in Nigerian newspapers. Significantly, it aligned with approaches from linguistic and gender studies to understand how sensitive gender issues are linguistically handled in Nigerian newspapers. The recurring finding is that language creates and sustains gender inequalities and there is a need for linguistic change that will necessitate social change (Litosseliti, 2006; Lazar, 2007), such that women and girls will not be seen as ordinary sexual objects.

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