

# **The Role of the Family Environment on the Prevalence of Rape in Cameroon**

## **INTRODUCTION**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 40 million children aged less than fifteen years are victims of rape every year. Girls in Africa are particularly affected and vulnerable due to their gender but also owing to socio-economic and cultural conditions prevailing in their communities of origin. They face violence within the family, the community and at school, and are also the main target of violence in moments of crisis and conflict. In Cameroon, around the 1970s, 02 cases of rape were reported against 203 reported rape cases in 2006. Therefore, the evolution of rape is noteworthy, as it is rising in an exponential manner. During a national survey conducted by GTZ in 2009, about 41, 102 households were visited and 37,719 women surveyed, it turned out that in the last 20 years, “5.2% of girls and women in Cameroon had been raped”, either more than 432,000 victims aged on average 15 years, 18% of rape cases were committed by a family member. In Cameroon, rape is a crime punishable by life imprisonment, but, only one rapist out of about 20 is convicted, largely due to the fact that rape is considered trivial in the society (Ndongo, 2009). As we study the extent and prevalence of the phenomenon in Cameroon, we will attempt to provide answers to the following questions: the socio-demographic characteristics of rapists, the relationship between rape victims and rapists and finally, we will outline the health consequences of rape.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

Our analysis is based on a survey carried out in 2009 by GIZ and the Ministry of Public Health and built on interviews of 37,719 women, from all regions of the country. According to statistical criteria, in order to obtain the rape prevalence rate to the nearest 5% per locality investigated, a minimum of 800 women must be interviewed, aged between 15 to 49 years. Therefore, 40 clusters were visited per locality. In each cluster, a minimum of 20 target homes were interviewed. The procedure was arranged such that the women would be interviewed in their respective homes. Overall, about 41,102 homes were visited and 37, 719 women interviewed.

The sample for these studies was made up of women of procreating age ranging from 15 to 49 years of age. In sum, 31,719 women were interviewed and their average age is 25 years.

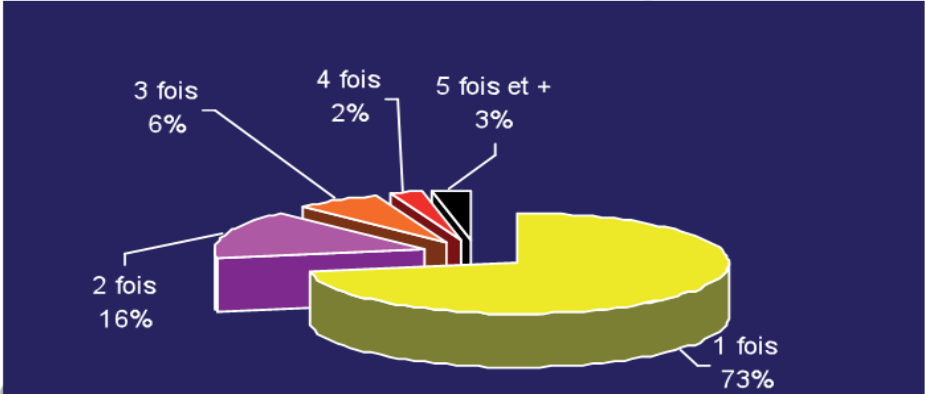
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **I. RAPE PREVALENCE**

The prevalence rate in the country stands at 5.2%. Thus, practically one out of 19 women is a victim of rape in Cameroon. Rape cases are observed across all regions of the country and vary from 3.7% for Adamawa to 7.3% in the North. The most affected areas are the North (7.3%), North West (7.1%) and Far North (6.8%) regions.

Among girls and women who were rape victims, 73% of them were raped once while 27% have been rape victims at least twice. The graph below shows the number of times the victims had been raped.

**GRAPH 1: number of times the victims have been raped**

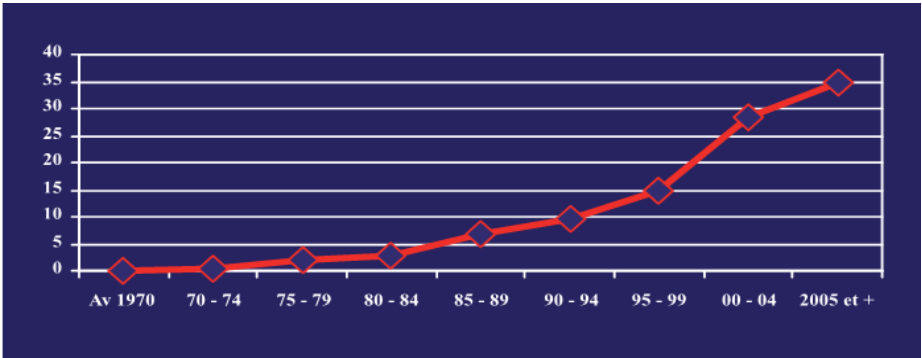


The regions in which the girls and women have been raped at least twice were predominantly those of the North (22.4%), North West (18.8%), Adamawa (10.4%), Centre (9.3%) and Littoral (8.9%).

**II. INCREASE OF RAPE CASES**

Around the 1970s, 2 rape cases were registered against 203 in 2006. Therefore, the increase of rape cases calls for attention due to its exponential growth as seen in the graph below.

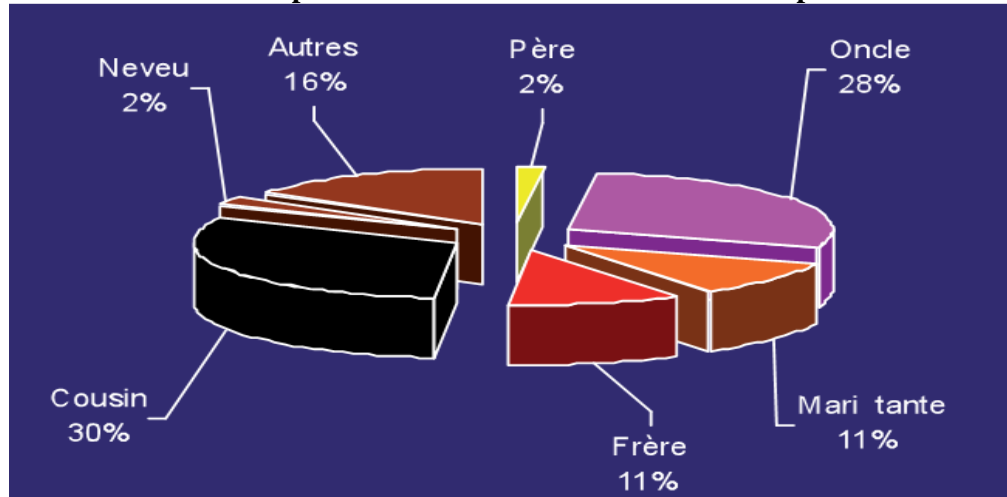
**GRAPH 2: Increase of rape cases in Cameroon (%)**



**III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RAPISTS AND THEIR VICTIMS**

It was mentioned earlier that most of the victims knew their tormentors. For 18% of victims, these tormentors are family members: cousins (30%), uncles (28%), aunt’s husband (11%), brothers (11%), nephews (2%), fathers (2%) etc.

**GRAPH 3: Relationship between the victim and the incestuous parent**



NB: the category “others” involves brothers-in-law, the aunt’s nephews or the brother-in-law, the grandfather, etc.

#### **IV. HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF RAPE**

The consequences of rape are numerous and include problems ranging from psychological, physical to social disorders. Within the ambit of these studies, we limited ourselves exclusively to those related to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and to pregnancy.

##### *IV.1. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) due to rape*

Concerning STIs, 16% of victims declared that they contracted the infections through rape (see table and graph below), against 72% declaring not having an STI and 12% who reported not knowing their health status. We can notice that the average age of the victims at the moment of rape for those who say they do not know whether they contracted an STI or not, is 13 years, compared to 15 years and 17 years respectively of those who reported not having an STI and those who reported that they had one. Again, we notice that it is in this group of victims who declare not knowing whether they contracted an STI or not, that rape is least reported (45%) compared to 55% and 64% respectively for those who reported not contracting an STI and those who report having contracted it.

##### *IV.2 HIV testing after rape*

33 % of victims have once carried out an HIV test after the incident as against 67% who never carried out the test.

##### *IV.3. Pregnancy and abortion due to rape*

24 % of victims found themselves pregnant after being raped.

Though Cameroonian law restricts abortion, it authorizes therapeutic abortion in case of rape in these terms: in case of pregnancy as a result of rape, therapeutic abortion is not an offence if it is carried out after an attestation of a public Ministry on the veracity of facts (Art 339 of the Penal Code, with 2 exceptions).

However, only one third (31%) of pregnant rape victims resorted to an abortion (Cf. table below).

In short, the number of rape cases in Cameroon is on the rise. Rape is perpetrated by strangers as well as close relations (family members, friends, comrades, neighbours). The rape victims are young with an average age of 15 years and their tormentors are aged on an average of 25 years. In general, the victims or their surroundings tend to stay silent and by so doing, unwittingly protect their tormentor, who left unpunished, will certainly attack other girls...Victims have difficulties seeking redress due to the requirement to produce a medical certificate, a filed complaint or due to shame etc. They are left to themselves and even within their families, they receive little or no support. With regards to complaints filed to report rape, only 16% of victims filed a complaint and moreover, 7% of rape cases were carried for jurisdiction. In 5% of rape cases, one out of 20 rapists is convicted in court.

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