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Sexual Rape of Women: Emerging Innovative Strategies for Prevention

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Abstract

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The persistent upsurge in the 21st century of incidents of violent rape and other attacks on women globally is witnessing growing concerns, reactions and innovations aimed at containing the menace. The United Nations, organizations and individuals continue to encourage, endorse and commit both human and material resources with the aim of curtailing, if not completely end, the ugly trend. Notwithstanding, the fear of this sexual assault remains a constant nightmare of today's women. This paper examines the emergence of innovative technologies around the world in response to the growing menace of rape, especially the rape of women, with a view to bringing respite to the victims of this abuse. Adopting the qualitative method of research, the paper interrogates the proliferation of these technologies to find out the reasons for their growing presence, method of use and effectiveness in addressing the violence of rape. It is hoped that the information assembled in this paper could help save yet a victim from another gender based violence.

Introduction

As an epidemic, rape is no longer a localized activity but a global worry that continues to draw the rage of many all over the world where the rights of its victims are taken for granted. Rape has become one of the most wide spread violent attacks on the female gender, even as it does not discriminate between the ages of the women. The few days old to the elderly are known to have been raped. The increasing cases of child rape, especially, have annulled the popular belief that women are raped because of their provocative ways of dressing. "How provocative can a child's dressing be in the view of an adult man to warrant her rape? Yet many children are being raped" (Ella 133). While it may be accepted that some level of careless exposure by women could attract some attacks on them, this position does not explain the reason for the violence of rape on the innocent girl-child. This is why McDonnell agrees that "No person provokes rape by acting or dressing in a particular manner;, rape is not a crime of lust, it is a crime of violence" (43).

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The failure of many countries to sufficiently strengthen their legal frameworks to address the pandemic amongst other lapses is a further reason for turning to technologies, innovations and other resources as interventions. While the interventions seek to prevent the violence or help the victims/survivors, they are fully unable to cater for all people experiencing the abuse, as culture and context can shape both the forms of the violence and the needs of the victims, especially in rural areas. Nonetheless, these interventions and especially the role of these legal frameworks in decisively enacting and enforcing all legislations to reduce all forms of violence against women cannot be overstressed.

The Challenge of Innovations

It was Vijay Govindarajan, a popular conference speaker, who retorted in *The Leadership Summit, 2013*, that … "Innovation is everything that 'strategy' is not". Govindarajan asserted that while strategy is a plan for the future, innovation is an effected change or a change currently being effected. This change could be rightly or wrongly on established or existing customs, norms or phenomena. Innovations are therefore not deterred by criticisms or the fear of failure as these become the stepping stones to further successes. Thus,

according to Tony Wagner, in *The Making of Young People Who will Change the World,* innovation takes place in every aspect of human endeavour as people become more sensitive, creative and inventive given the right environment and opportunities. The media, (video productions inclusive) have always been instrumental in giving publicity to these innovations.

Recent phenomenal escalations in violent rapes in some parts of the world are creating the right atmosphere and opportunities for innovative technologies to be deployed into action to bring about change. Though it is one thing to sermonize and strategize about the need for change, if nothing is done, the situation remains the same as "man continues in his behavior but…if we sensitize and rehabilitate him, he changes" (Wagner). This is the difference between strategy and innovation. As Aampll notes in (Wagner), it is like saying

> …this light bulb needs to be changed. So we do nothing, but turn on the power and what do you get? – Darkness. But if we take out the old bulb, get a new one and screw it on, then turn on the power –light will be the obvious result. This is to say that innovations produce results; whether negative or positive (214).

To be innovative therefore demands the taking of an action in spite of the risk of a possible failure. Innovation has always being a challenge.

In reaction to the brutal gang rape of the female medical student in New Delhi, India in 2012, and several other cases of rape that followed in Egypt, South Africa, DR Congo and Nigeria;, individuals, organizations and companies, especially in the USA, India and South Africa reorganized their thoughts in new fashions to address the rape pandemic. The outcome of these reorganizations and actions are what now abound as 'innovative technologies developed to check the frightening escalation in rape globally.

In addition, the endorsement by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, USA) to commit itself to every action to accomplish disease prevention through all influence, individuals, relationships, community and society to prevent rape from happening in the first place, in no small way inspired these innovative technologies. This stance empowers parents, students, educators and mentors to use technology as a tool for identifying risk factors and promoting resilience within their communities.

The challenges were also taken more seriously to curtail current ways existing technologies are also being misused to propagate other gender-based violence, especially on children. For example, the National Center On Sexual Exploitation, (NCOSE) is succeeding in systematically persuading social media giants like Google, Facebook, Youtube and Verizon to re-consider their positions on pornographic advertisements to protect children from the harms of pornography. Part of the results of this persuasion is the recent action taken by Facebook in its age restriction on the surfing of some harmful websites. As NCOSE Executive Director, Dawn Hawkins asserts:

> We have been involved in the fight to keep our public airwaves clean for decades… Why should…distributors of hardcore pornography be rewarded for their callous disregard for decency and the wellbeing of individuals and families? It is a violation of U.S to distribute hardcore, obscene pornography (1).

While this appears to be a welcome development in view of the frightening statistics of child rape and other molestations occasioned by the proliferation of the Internet, some still kick against this action by Google as being retrogressive in a modern age. For them, children should be given unrestricted access to the Internet.

Recently too, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) launched a pilot scheme to put age ratings on music videos online. Mixed reactions still pour in on this action taken and endorsed by the British Government. Jessie J, a music artiste supporting the rating says, "However much I enjoy being an inspiration, there are parts of my life as a 26-year old woman that some of my young fans shouldn't see". (BBC Newsbeat). On the other hand, Ben Howard, a singer, calls the ratings "Stupid" as according to him, the idea of age rating on music videos is a bit pointless because "Kids have access to everything nowadays". For Howard,

"it feels like backtracking" (*BBC Newsbeat*). While some support and glorify the easy access to all sorts of information made possible by the new technologies, others caution and call for moderation, to protect especially children from harm.

Statistics from CDC show that a majority of sexual abuse victims are children. It also shows that 60 % of all rape victims are female while 70% of all rape victims are children under 18 years. The statistics confirm that peer to peer abuse can occur through sending sexual images to unintended recipients under 18 years. The sexual offenders often post videos and photos online or directly to people's emails. This study of online abuse indicates that abused children manifest warning signs which parents or guardians must take seriously to deliver them from further abuse. Some indicators that a child is being abused online according to the study range from pregnancy to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), to substance abuse. "Sexually abused children are 2 ½ times more likely to abuse alcohol and 4 times more likely to abuse drugs".(CDC).

Other manifesting symptoms that a child is being abused as the study declares are, "eating disorder, running away from home, self-destructive behaviours, criminal activity, depression, school difficulties and sudden changes in behaviour". (CDC).

These findings are important to this work as helping the children and other young adults to correctly employ and cope with these technologies and innovations would reduce the rate of abuse and other violations on children and women. They are also relevant as timely interventions could prevent the violence from happening in the first place or help the survivor cope or assist others experiencing the abuse. On the other hand, the negative use of some of these innovative technologies is being blamed for the numerous increasing cases of violence against women and children, although rape cases are generally grossly under-reported in many cultures for several other reasons.

Proliferation of the Innovative Technologies

One reason advanced by a company involved in the manufacture of a device for preventing rape defends the good intensions of the organization. According to the company, "… our goal is to invent technologies that empower women to protect themselves from this heinous and quietly pervasive crime" (Mogilevsky 1). This makes being a rapist in the 21st century very dangerous and risky with all the emerging hi-tech anti-rape devices. Although a closer interaction with some of these innovative technologies may reveal other reasons for their manufacture beyond helping to prevent abuse. This raises the question of whether the technological devices and innovations are solely supportive in combatting rape and other violent attacks or have ulterior motives of economic exploitation of the users.

It is no exaggeration to say that the innovative technologies available in the market today to prevent rape and other violent attacks on women are growing astronomically. The common ones include: the Smart Water (Spray), Anti-rape Under-wears (called SHE), Anti-Rape Necklaces and Lipsticks, Nail Polish, Anti-Rape Female Condom (called Rape-Axe or The Teeth), Informacam, Circle of 6, Circle of 6 India, Safety-City, Harass Map, Panic Button, Door Sleeve (called the Door Devil), FemDefence, The Snare, Anti-Rape Buckle, The Injector, Angel Wing Buzzing, Spy Cameras. For space and time, we shall consider only a few of these innovative devices.

The Informacam This technology is a mobile application developed by WITNESS and The Guardian Project (USA) to solve the issue of digital verification, in other words, the technology is able to verify date and location. According to the manufacturers, when used, it can answer the questions of 'who', 'where' and 'when', then encrypts and sends the files to a trusted source. This could be friends or the police. The information generated by Informacam is essential as it can be used as evidence in court to bring justice to victims and survivors of rape.

Circle of 6

This is another mobile application designed to stop sexual violence before it happens. Specifically designed for college students, it allows the user to choose 6 friends that are trusted to keep tracks of the user's where-about and safety. According to the manufacturers, "With two touches on your phone,

you can let your networks know where you are and how they can help you". The application uses GPS to show locations.

Circle of 6- India
This mobile application is localized to suit the use in India, using Hindi Language but operates exactly like the Circle of 6. The application was developed immediately after the New Delhi gang rape of a female medical student.

Safety City The technology is a crow map that allows users to anonymously report if they have been sexually harassed or abused in public spaces in 2 minutes. The victim fills out a form that is automatically transmitted to the website (www.safecity.in) where help will be initiated.

PanicButton
This, like the others is a mobile phone application. Developed by Amnesty International, the innovation shows how people can protect themselves when under attack. The device becomes operational when the phone's power button is pressed repeatedly. This triggers a pre-set text alert to be sent to three pre-entered contacts. If the user has a GPS activated on the phone, it will reveal the location on a map to the contacts and keep updating a video display of the location regularly. "Because the application is cleverly disguised and easy to access, it can be used secretly. Anyone threatening you won't realize that the phone is sending out distress signals". (O'Carrol 12).

As an emerging technology, Panic Button is still being refined for optimum benefit. According to O'Carroll,

> Right now, 130 volunteers and activists in 16 countries across Central America, East Africa and the Philippines are helping us refine it by using it and giving us feedbacks. We are really excited that so many people feel that the app can make a tangible difference to how safe they feel. (12)

Although Panic Button is still being refined, users are already expressing confidence on the innovative device. "We think Panic Button is a tool that can be useful in countries like Sudan…where often families of victims struggle to know the where-about of their loved one" (Activist from Sudan). Another activist from the Philippines yet comments: "I wish I might not have to use it in the future. But the threat is so real that having a tool like the Panic Button could be of help in an emergency" (12). This indeed undoubtedly demonstrates what a simple technology can achieve when utilized in the appropriate manner. While the above mentioned are all mobile application-based technology, there are still others operating differently.

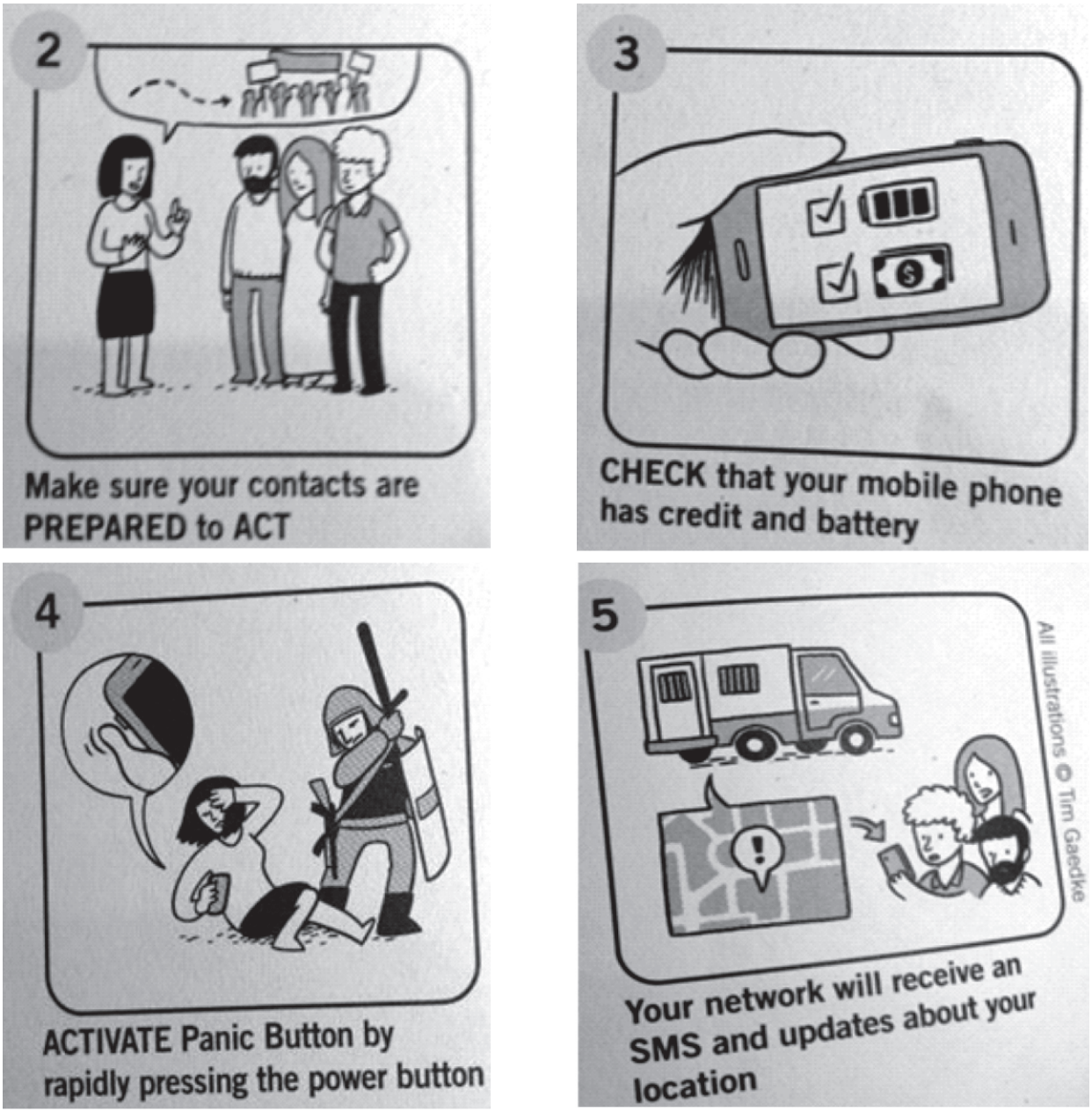

Plate 1: Steps for Activating the Panic Button:
Courtesy of *The Wire*, Amnesty International.

Anti-rape Underwear This is designed by a group of engineering students in India. The underwear is able to shock a would-be rapist with up to 3,800 kilovolts of electricity and then send an emergency text message to alert the police. Incidentally, the invention is named SHE (Society Harnessing Equipment). The Pants are made from fabrics that resist every form of force. Once worn, they cannot be removed without the full cooperation of the user.

FemDefence Tampon The woman wears this protective device in her vagina. It contains a sharp pin which has a penetrating effect on the perpetrator's penis in the event of rape. The design is such that the sharp pin cannot injure the bearer.

The Injector This features two Pneumatic Syringes which inject tattoo dye and sedatives into a rapist. The sedative stops the sexual predator instantaneously by causing him to sleep while the dye permanently tattoos him for positive identification.

Hairy Stockings This first appeared in 2013. The scary hairs, it is believed, do not attract any attacker to the victim.

The Snare This is a belt styled device that ensnares and then viciously mangles the attacker with two sharp prongs that dig into his flesh.

Anti-Rape Buckle This is a belt designed by Swedish girls. It requires the use of both hands to remove. The time it takes the attacker to remove the belt while engaging his two hands gives the victim ample opportunity to call the police. The belt sells for $50.00.

Electric Bra This operates on the same principle as the Society Harnessing Equipment (SHE). When it detects the use of unwanted force, it sends out 82 shocks at short intervals at the source of the unwanted force, making it almost impossible for the abuse to happen.

The Smart Water or Spray Produced in the USA, Smart-Water sprays dye water on would-be assailants and marks them with permanent ink stains. With the permanent ink marks, the perpetrator can easily be apprehended and arrested.

Rape Axe (The Teeth) This is an anti-rape female condom invented by Sonnet Ehlers, a South African woman. The innovative device consists of a latex (rubber) sheath which contains razor-sharp barbs. It is worn in the vagina like a tampon. When the attacker attempts vaginal penetration, the barbs attach themselves to the penis, causing great discomfort. The device can only be removed through surgical operation. This, of course will result in the identification of the attacker and his subsequent arrest.

Conclusion

Rape is a serious global violence that affects more women than men. Emerging global conversations and actions are in favour of projects that will help to eliminate all forms of violence against women. While it is highly commendable that people are responding to the issue of rape and other sexual violence with hi-tech innovations, it is not very clear if these actions are sufficient or are all coming in good faith for the prevention and protection from rape or for the financial gains of the inventors. This is because the devices are already being commercialized for profit. It is obvious that these innovations are not without their drawbacks and limitations. The guarantee that these innovations will be made affordable for the rural woman and girl, and not misused must be ascertained before a final declaration can be made that a total prevention and protection from rape have emerged.

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