

# **Indecent Dressing and Rape in Nigeria: A Biblical Response**

**Gbenga Aboyeji Adeniyi**

**Elizabeth Omowumi Adeniyi**

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## **Introduction**

Philosophically, every effect has a cause. Situating it within the context of this paper, rape cases on most occasions are spurred by indecent dressing. Kunhiyop avers that African culture places premium on cultured dressing.<sup>497</sup> This is a pointer to the fact that Africans are rich in dressing. It is seldom to have rape cases in ancient times as it is today. One of the motivating factors is indecent dressing in our time an enigma this paper seeks to address. Indecent dressing is affecting the Nigerian society so grossly than envisaged. Unfortunately, the media is a major motivator of this act. There is hardly an advert being televised that nudity is not marketed. There seems to be no curtailing measure to this in our society; this is a great hubbub in our time. It is not gainsaying to say that such has negative impact in our society and mental health. It is not only pronounced among the feminine gender; it is also among the masculine gender but mostly pronounced among women.

Then we ask; “What must be the Christian ethical standard (in congruence with biblical injunction) in relation to dressing and how can it translate to what church will uphold in our society? This is a concern for this paper and the researchers

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<sup>497</sup> Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethics* (Nairobi: Word alive Hippo Books, 2008), 231.

have been able to look into the key variables in the topic: first “indecent dressing” and secondly, “rape.” Discussion around the two variables cannot be achieved in details in this short paper, as each is an entity on its own; that as it may be, both are looked into as there exist a link there in. There is need to look into the issue of dressing from biblical perspective since we uphold the maxim that **“in matters of faith and practice, the Bible remains our final authority.”**

### **Biblical Stance on Dress**

In describing the mode of dress appropriate for women in church, the apostle Paul exhorts them to dress “modestly” with “decency and propriety” then goes on to contrast immodest dress with the good deeds which are appropriate for those who profess to be true worshipers of God (1 Timothy 2:9–10). While the Bible only specifically addresses the need for women to dress modestly, the same teaching would apply to men in principle. Both men and women should bring glory to God in their manner of dress.

Modesty in the way we dress is not just for church; it is to be the standard for all Christians at all times. The key to understanding what constitutes modesty in dress is to examine the attitudes and intents of the heart. Those whose hearts are inclined toward God will make every effort to dress modestly, decently, and appropriately. Those whose hearts are inclined toward self will dress in a manner designed to draw attention to themselves with little or no regard for the consequences to themselves or others. This is why on most occasion Christian ladies are mostly lured into the world system in relation to dressing.

### ***Dressing: Women in focus and its Implication on Men***

Elizabeth George comments that; “a godly woman endeavors to do everything with a “God-ward” perspective.”<sup>498</sup> This implies that she knows that God wants His people to be concerned for His glory and the spiritual state of their brothers and sisters in Christ. If a woman professes to be a Christian yet she dresses in a way that will unduly draw attention to her body, she is a poor witness of the One who bought her soul by dying for her on the cross. She is forgetting that her body has been redeemed by Christ and is now the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). She is telling the world that she determines her own worth on a purely physical basis and that her attractiveness depends on how much of her body she reveals to them. Further, by intentionally dressing in an immodest fashion, displaying her body for men to lust after, she encourages her brothers in Christ to sin, something condemned by God (Matthew 5:27–29). Proverbs 7:10 mentions a woman “dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent” – here, the woman’s heart condition is displayed by her manner of dress.

The Scripture says that we are to dress modestly, but what exactly does that mean in modern society? Does a woman have to be covered from head to toe? There are cults and religions in the world that demand this of women. But is that the biblical meaning of modesty? Again, we have to go back to the matter of attitudes of the heart. If a woman’s heart is inclined toward godliness, she will wear clothing that is neither provocative nor revealing in public. Her clothing choices will not signal pride or ostentation and will not reflect negatively upon her personal testimony as a child of God. Everyone else in her circle may be dressing immodestly, but she resists the temptation to go along with the crowd. She avoids clothing designed to draw attention to her body and cause men to lust, for she is wise enough to know that type of attention only cheapens her. The idea of giving occasion for

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<sup>498</sup> Elizabeth George, *A Woman After God’s Own Heart* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 47.

men to sin against God because of her dress is abhorrent to her because she seeks to love and honor God and wants others to do the same. Modesty in dress reveals a modesty and godliness of the heart, humble attitudes that should be the desire of all women (and men) who live to please and honor God.

That been addressed, there is need to also look into biblical stance on the issue of rape. Would it be justified and ethically correct to say that, when there is indecent dressing being displayed; it is license for sexual assault or molestation (rape)? Obviously not so. Two wrong does not make a right. What then does the bible says about rape?

### **Rape and the Bible: Old and New Testament Explored**

The Bible does address the issue of rape. As expected, when the Bible mentions the crime of rape, it is depicted as a gross violation of God's design for the treatment of the human body (Genesis 34). The Bible condemns rape whenever it is mentioned. For example, there is a particular passage in the laws given to the nation of Israel before entering the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. Holcomb explains that this passage (Deuteronomy 22:23–29) spoke directly against forcing a woman into a sexual encounter against her will, or what we know today as rape.<sup>499</sup> This command was meant to protect women and to protect the nation of Israel from committing sinful actions.

Deuteronomy 22:23–27 gives guidelines on what constituted rape and specifies the punishment for a man who raped a betrothed woman. In a sexual assault, the betrothed woman was responsible to actively resist the rapist, if possible—she was to “scream for help” (Deuteronomy 22:24). If she failed to resist when she could have done so, the law viewed the

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<sup>499</sup> Lindsey & Justin Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2008), 25–26.

situation as consensual sex, not rape, and both parties were guilty. If the assault took place in an isolated area, the law gave the woman the benefit of the doubt, assuming she had resisted her attacker, and she was not held culpable (Deuteronomy 22:27). The law stipulated that a rapist was to be killed by stoning (Deuteronomy 22:25). Though the Mosaic Law was for the nation of Israel during the time of Moses, the principle is clear that rape is sinful in the eyes of God and, under the law, led to the most extreme punishment possible—death for the rapist.

There are some difficult passages in the Old Testament in relation to this issue. One is Deuteronomy 22:28–29, “If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay her father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the young woman, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives.” If the rape victim was not betrothed, then the rapist faced different consequences.

We must see Deuteronomy 22:28–29 through the lens of ancient culture. In those days, social convention treated women poorly. They could not own property. They could not get a job to support themselves. If a woman had no father, husband, or son, she had no legal protection. Her options were slavery or prostitution. If an unmarried woman was not a virgin, it was extremely difficult for her to get married. If she was not marriageable, her father did not have much use for her.

God’s punishment on the rapist of a virgin—a monetary fine and lifelong responsibility—was designed to deter rape by holding the rapist responsible for his actions.<sup>500</sup> He ruined her life; it was his responsibility to support her for the rest of her life. This may not sound fair to modern ears, but we do not

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<sup>500</sup> Lindsey & Justin Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault*. 28.

live in the same culture they did. In 2 Samuel 13, Prince Amnon raped his half-sister, Tamar. The horror and shame of being violated yet unmarried made Tamar beg him to marry her (her half-brother!), even after he had rejected her. And her full-brother, Absalom, was so disgusted with the situation that he murdered Amnon. That is how highly virginity in women was prized back then.

Critics of the Bible also point to Numbers 31 (and similar passages) in which the Israelites were allowed to take female captives from nations they conquered. Critics say this is an example of the Bible's condoning or even promoting rape. However, the passage says nothing about raping the captive women. It is wrong to assume that the captive women were to be raped. The soldiers were commanded to purify themselves and their captives (verse 19). Rape would have violated this command (see Leviticus 15:16–18). The women who were taken captive are never referred to as sexual objects. Did the captive women likely eventually marry amongst the Israelites? Yes. Is there any indication that rape or sex slavery was forced upon the women? Absolutely not.

In the New Testament, rape is not mentioned directly, but within the Jewish culture of the day, rape would have been considered sexual immorality. Jesus and the apostles spoke against sexual immorality, even offering it as justifiable grounds for divorce (Matthew 5:32).

Further, the New Testament is clear that Christians are to obey the laws of their governing authorities (Romans 13). Not only is rape morally wrong; it is also wrong according to the laws of the land. As such, anyone who would commit this crime should expect to pay the consequences, including arrest and imprisonment.

To the victims of rape, we must offer much care and compassion. God's Word often speaks about helping those in need and in vulnerable situations. Christians should model

the love and compassion of Christ by assisting victims of rape in any way possible.

People are responsible for the sins they commit, including rape. However, no one is beyond the grace of God. Even to those who have committed the vilest of sins, God can extend forgiveness if they repent and turn from their evil ways (1 John 1:9). This does not remove the need for punishment according to the law, but it can offer hope and the way to a new life.

The indecent dressing has come to characterize the dress pattern of many youths especially in Nigeria and the church is not excluded.<sup>501</sup> There is hardly any city in this country that is not faced with this disgusting problem. The way these youth particularly the female ones dress seductively leaves much to be desired. What the girls call skirts that they wear is just one inch longer than their pants. When they put on such dresses, they struggle to sit down, find it difficult in climbing motorcycles, cross covet as well as pick anything from the ground. Apart from the tight-fitting nature of these dresses, they are again transparent, revealing certain parts of the bodies that under normal dressing patterns ought to be hidden away from the glare of people. In the case of boys, their pattern of the dress is different, it makes them look so dirty and very unattractive with unkempt hairs and dirty jeans that have pockets of holes deliberately created around the knees and the lower part of the trousers allowed to flow on the ground because they go through their heels into their legs as socks.

The waist of their trousers are lowered and fastened tightly at the middle of the bottom lobes to reveal their boxers pants and when they are walking, they drag their legs and one of their

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<sup>501</sup> Lindsey & Justin Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault*, 30.

hands particularly, the left one cupping their invisible scrotum as if they will fall to the ground if not supposed. Many of them because of how they dressed has at one time or the other become victims of rape, lured into prostitution, used for ritual purposes, unable to complete their education or training, and also engaged in other ancillary social and moral problems like cultism, lying, and other anti-social behaviour. Although there are known universally acceptable ways or ways of dressing, dresses are meant to serve some definable purpose, country, or region notwithstanding.

### **Traceable Origin Indecent Dressing**

Olorunda and Alaynde posit that this behaviour is of western origin.<sup>502</sup> It is not just a behaviour that developed overnight, but an accumulated behavioural pattern that could be attributed to the home due to neglect and/or poor parenting. The effects of globalization arising from wrong values of exportation and importation, a reflection of a high rate of moral decadence in the large society, corruption, and peer pressure, and the desire to belong, as well as fading values and negative influence, all contribute to the act of indecent dressing. Parents, school administrators, society leaders are some of the important factors that contribute to the indecent dressing of youth. Globalization and modernization's effect in third world countries has permeated almost all facets of indigenous values and norms. It has become so obvious that if you do not behave, dress or speak like the Europeans, you are seen as primitive, unexposed, and sometimes deviant. One major social category that the craze for modernization has transformed is the youth. The youth in Africa now want to be exactly like their European counterparts in dressing, speaking, and behavior, this undoubtedly has several

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<sup>502</sup> Sola Olorunda and Emmanuel Alayande "Indecency Dressing among Youth in South-West, Nigeria" *International Journal of Academic Multidisciplinary Research (IJAMR)* Vol. 6 Issue 6, June - 2022, 172-180.



implications on the indigenous culture and social values as well as the health wellbeing of the people.

Most worrisome of these is the adaptive culture of the youth, manifested in indecent dressing both in a public gathering and around their environment that is strongly contrary to the traditional socio-cultural values of dressing. Indeed, the dressing pattern of youth in Nigeria has gone from bad to worse as each year passes by. Most of them seem to have become addicted to indecent dressing patterns. Formerly, female youth were seen to be the worst gender among whom indecent dressing is found<sup>503</sup> but recently, their male counterparts are trying to meet up with them as the male are going almost naked too calling it the fashion of Sagging. Yet, the health implications to those who engage have not been understood.

In Nigeria, sagging is a recent phenomenon, at the dawn of the 21st century there was hardly anything like the sagging of pants, but from around 2009 to date, the dress pattern seems to have overtaken the youth in Nigeria especially those in the higher institutions of learning.<sup>504</sup>

From observation, one can infer that out of every ten young people in the street, 2 to 5 sag their trousers (pants). This has led to cultural adulterations; it erodes our moral values and norms which is the very essence of African society. The trend is fast spreading to even secondary school students in both private and public schools. This trend is fast threatening the values of Nigerian society as the youths are the major drivers of development in all ramifications. If the youths continue to go naked in the street, the Nigerian government may have more problems at hand than trying to solve the problems of

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<sup>503</sup> A. Oyeleye, *Indecent Dressing a Social Malady*: [www.nationhtml](http://www.nationhtml) Accessed on August, 2022.

<sup>504</sup> E. Rykrsmith, Dress Code or not what to wear, mater on the net Saturday Punch: May 23, 2012. Accessed on December, 2022.

unemployment or poverty due to its health-related consequences.

### **Scholars Overview on Indecent Dressing Vis-à-vis Decent Dressing**

In simple term, decent dressing can be explained as the proper way of dressing or the generally accepted way of dressing without exposing vital parts of the human body. Yahaya that decent dressing, of course, is part of human life, because it elicits respect and protects the person's dignity.<sup>505</sup> Indecent dressing on the other hand is the improper and provocative way of dressing relative to the society or culture in which it is being perpetrated. This is to say that indecent dressing cannot be properly defined in isolation of the societal norms. What is indecent to you in say Nigeria is decent elsewhere. This brings to the fore the assertion of some schools of thought that indecent dressing is mainly due to "foreign culture." Meaning this way of dressing is alien to Nigeria culture and is therefore an affront to our very existence and identity.

Egwmim, referred to indecent dressing in a more specific term as the attitude of someone, male or female that dresses to show off parts of the body such as the breasts, buttocks, or even the underwear particularly those of the ladies that need to be covered.<sup>506</sup> In addition, there are those who believe that indecent dressing bothers so much on morality hence they ascribe some moral meanings to it. They say indecent dressing is any type of dressing that society abhors. Olori, this form of dressing is provocative, improper, and morally

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<sup>505</sup> Yahaya, M. (2003). Students Immorality and Indecent Dressing on Campus. [www.es/network.com](http://www.es/network.com) retrieved on July 10th, 2017. Accessed on March, 2019.

<sup>506</sup> C. Egwmim, *Indecent Dressing among Youths* Accessed on August, 2022 <http://www.es/network.com/webpages/featureshttp://www.es/network.com/webpages/features>.

unacceptable.<sup>507</sup> These dress patterns are morally offensive and reveal the high rate of moral decadence in the society of our time. The indecent dressing can be understood based on the prevailing norms and acceptable ways of dressing relative to the society in which it is being perpetrated. It is therefore clear and lucid that the explanation of indecent dressing is subject to societal expectations.

According to Oyeleye, indecent dressing simply means the deliberate exposure of one's body to the public.<sup>508</sup> This practice is contrary to the acceptable norms and values of society. Moral decadence on the other is a reduction in the level of morality in society. Adeboye defined indecent dressing as the wearing of clothes that are not appropriate for a particular occasion or situation.<sup>509</sup> She further explained that it is not indecent to go naked in the bathroom, in labour room, or in the bedroom with your partner. The statement further stated that parts of the body (usually sexual organs) that normally should be covered for girls would be their breasts, thighs, and buttocks.

From the above definitions and scholarly overview, the common denominator has to do with exposing private parts of the body. Indecent dressing is sex suggestive; it is a major cause of sexual harassment in our time.

### **Impact or Effect of Indecent Dressing in Nigeria**

One sometimes wonders why most people wear these clothes (indecent dressing). As a matter of fact, it could be as a result of what they see in the media, poor parenting/moral upbringing, peer pressure and also, a feeling of wanting to be

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<sup>507</sup> T. Olori, *Indecent Dressing Banned on the Campus*: inter Press Service [www.ipsnews.net](http://www.ipsnews.net) retrieved on March 15th, 2022. Accessed on August, 2022.

<sup>508</sup> A. Oyeleye, *Indecent Dressing a Social Malady*: [www.nationhtml](http://www.nationhtml) Accessed on August, 2022.

<sup>509</sup> T. Adeboye, *Indecent Dressing*: Retrieved August, 2017. [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com)

among a particular group of people. They do not remember that for every action, there is a reaction. What then are the effects of indecent dress? Suffice it to say that some of these dresses bring about discomfort. For instance, a lady who wears a miniskirt won't have much freedom in sitting comfortably or when entering a vehicle or a motorcycle, yet they wear them. This is mirage of thought.

1. **Sexual harassment or Rape Tendency:** This provocative act can lead to rape.
2. As a result of what they wear, they might be **lured into prostitution** by their peers.
3. They may also be **influenced to join one cult group** or the other.
4. A lady who dresses indecently may **be seen as a harlot** even though she might not be a harlot. Her dress had given her a bad image.
5. Indecent dressing can **devalue** a woman because it exposes what forms her treasure.
6. To the males, it gives them the emblem or **image of irresponsibility**.

## **Conclusion**

The researchers posit that there is need to be careful of liberalism especially in the area of dressing. That a culture supports nudity and calls it her code as related to dressing must not make us buy into that ideology. The Bible is clear about every matter, when it comes to dressing, modesty is the standard (2 Tim. 2:9-10) and there is nothing to justify beating below the scriptural imperatives. I posit that biblical position or injunction about modesty is never relative; it is absolute. When a thing is good and not godly after being sieved with biblical lens, it means it is not good for us as Christians. If rape case, would be nipped in our society, indecent dressing must be addressed and jettisoned because the later (indecent dressing) is a stimulator to the later (rape or sexual harassment).

## Recommendation

The researcher recommends that;

1. The home should be a virtuous institution for the inculcation of morals and crusade against indecent dressing. Suffice to say that a child in a community whether good or bad has a home as well as parents. The environment has a greater influence on the development of any child. Dressing bothers more on morality hence, teaching moral education must be upheld and taught by parents.
2. Parents must model godly morale: I agree with Adeniyi who posits that “children are bound to reflect what they see their parent’s model because they are the first teachers.”<sup>510</sup> During their formative period specially growing from infancy toward teenage, they learn by observing what they see parents doing and it sticks to their subconscious mind and to undo such from their mind is always very challenging. They look at the way their parents shoulder responsibilities at home, they watch how their parents approach issues within and outside the homes; they look at the parents’ attitudes to truthfulness and other virtues of life. In the same vein, they are brought up; in the way and manner the parents live. Thus, parents cannot afford to appear ungodly in their moral modeling.
3. The church or Christian community must not be silent about any moral upheaval like indecent dressing. Teaching must be geared toward this side of life as it will tell on the image of the church. In other words, Religious leaders must preach against indecent dressing, counsel and deliver those under demonic influences. Through regular sermons as well as

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<sup>510</sup> Gbenga Aboyeji Adeniyi, *Functionality of Christian Home as a Sine-Qua-Non for the Moral Upbringing of Children in the Light of Deuteronomy 6:1-9* (Igbaja: Postgraduate Thesis 2019), 92.

counseling, religious leaders should resist ill development of their members, from counseling of their members, they may be able to discover those that are demon-possessed and deliver them.

4. If possible, the government should have a restrict measure on what is being advertised on the social media. In other words, rather than supporting indecent dressing, the government should confront and discipline culpable acts.
5. Rape cases are not justified and must be decisively dealt with in the society no matter what lead to it.

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