

How Lagos couple tortured adopted daughter to death, hid corpse

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By Dayo Oyewo

Dayo Oyewo writes on how a 10-year-old girl, Faith, allegedly died after weeks of abuse and neglect, and how her lifeless body was reportedly kept inside a room overnight

Residents of Jemesi Papa Street, Egan, in the Igando area of Lagos State, are still struggling to come to terms with the tragic death of a 10-year-old girl, identified simply as Faith, and the disturbing circumstances surrounding her demise.

What began as an ordinary Sunday night in the modest compound at No. 16, has since unravelled into a chilling story of alleged abuse, neglect and concealment.

The minor was reportedly ill for about two weeks before her death, yet neighbours alleged that the physical abuse and harsh treatment she endured continued unabated despite her worsening condition.

The situation allegedly took a fatal turn on Sunday when the husband and wife were said to have brutally beaten the already ailing child, leading to her death.

It was gathered that the couple had allegedly subjected the girl to persistent maltreatment, including frequent beatings and strenuous errands considered inappropriate for a child her age.

The suspects, identified as Paul Onyeama and his wife, Adline, are currently in police custody following the grim discovery that has left residents of the community shocked and traumatised.

Suspicion begins with strange visitors

During a visit to the house on Friday, only a few occupants were seen moving around quietly as they went about their daily activities, while tension and unease hung in the atmosphere.

A neighbour, Ferdinand Igwe, who said he witnessed the events from the beginning, recalled that the first sign that something was wrong emerged late on Sunday night.

Igwe, whose room directly faces the couple's apartment in the bungalow, said he became uneasy after noticing unusual movement in the compound on the night of the incident.

"I came back around 10 or 11pm and was about to cook when I noticed movement. I saw about eight to 10 strange men entering our compound through the backyard. I had never seen them before. I turned off my light and watched from my window. The way they came in quietly made me suspicious. I didn't know if they were criminals or relatives," he told our correspondent.

According to him, the men spoke an Igbo dialect that he could not understand. Although they later left the compound, the strange visit continued to trouble him.

Unknown to him at the time, a tragedy had already unfolded behind the doors of his neighbours' apartment.

"I even stepped out to see where they were going, but they had already disappeared," he added.

Meanwhile, on Monday morning, the wife's behaviour further heightened suspicions.

"She is the type that goes to the market very early, before 7 am. But that morning, she was still at home, lying quietly in the backyard. I approached her and asked if she was okay. She didn't answer. I even spoke to her in Igbo, but she still kept quiet," he said.

Her silence, coupled with her body language, struck Igwe as unusual, while her actions throughout the morning deepened his suspicion.

"She looked worried, like something was seriously wrong, and still refused to talk when I went to her. She kept going in and out of the room, locking the door repeatedly. She cooked food, served her children, packed the rest in a flask, and still continued locking the door. I was watching everything. It didn't make sense," Igwe said.

The situation took a dramatic turn later that morning when a group of women arrived at the compound and went straight into the suspect's apartment.

"About 10 or 11 women came in and entered her room. Moments later, cries erupted. I heard them shouting, 'She's dead! She's dead!' I was confused. I came out and asked what happened, but nobody answered me," Igwe recalled.

Determined to uncover what had happened, he prevented anyone from leaving the compound by shutting the gate.

“I shut the gate and said nobody would leave until I knew what was happening. After persistent questioning, one of the women told me the girl had died. I said, ‘Which girl?’ because the only child I knew there was that small girl,” he said.

Unconvinced, Igwe said he rushed into the room, where Faith’s lifeless body was found wrapped on a chair. According to him, the scene became even more disturbing upon closer observation.

“I touched the girl, and she was already stiff. That was when I realised she had been dead for some time. They had already put cotton wool in her nose and mouth. I asked the woman, ‘Who did this? How do you know all these things?’”

The discovery quickly attracted other residents, many of whom reacted with anger and disbelief.

As they struggled to process the incident, the revelation that the girl’s corpse had allegedly remained inside the room overnight left many stunned.

Another resident, Angela Orji, told our correspondent that the discovery nearly triggered mob action after news of the incident spread through the neighbourhood.

“When people came around to see the corpse, they were furious. When they heard what had been happening to the child, they attempted to beat the woman. It took the intervention of others to stop them. They told her she was not going anywhere and that if she could stay with a corpse overnight and act normal, then she should wait for the police,” she said.

Signs of prolonged abuse

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As residents reflected on the tragedy, many began recounting disturbing observations they had made in the weeks leading up to Faith’s death.

Neighbours said the victim showed visible signs of neglect and abuse, adding that she was not enrolled in school and was regularly subjected to strenuous labour.

“If you saw the girl, you would not believe she belonged to that family. She looked malnourished and was not properly cared for. The woman sells foodstuffs in the community and usually takes Faith along. When they left in the morning, she would carry heavy loads, sometimes even a 6kg gas cylinder, both in the morning and evening. A small girl doing that kind of work,” Orji added.

According to her, cries from the apartment were frequent, while the girl had reportedly been ill for about two weeks before her death.

“Sometimes you would hear her crying. I never saw them beat her outside, but you could hear it from inside. The girl had been sick for about two weeks, but instead of taking care of her, they kept sending her on errands,” she said.

Alleged attempt to dispose of body

Residents alleged that while Adline was being questioned after the discovery, Paul had earlier left the compound in what they believed was an attempt to dispose of the body.

Tension escalated when he later returned and discovered that the incident had already been exposed, prompting residents to restrain him.

“He said he went to look for a vehicle. I asked him, ‘Vehicle for what?’ He said he wanted to carry the girl somewhere. We thought he might be trying to run away or dispose of the body,” another resident, who identified herself simply as Ajoke, told our correspondent.

While being questioned by residents, Paul reportedly claimed the child had been sick and was taken to the hospital for treatment.

Findings later revealed, however, that the girl had allegedly died before she was taken for medical attention.

Speaking on the incident, the Coordinator of the Take It Back Movement in Lagos State, Taofeek Adekunle, said Faith was taken to a hospital and pharmacy on Sunday night, where she was declared dead on arrival.

“While I was questioning the suspect, he claimed the girl was sick and that they rushed her to the hospital, where she died during treatment. I asked which hospital, and the doctor there is known to me. When I called him, he confirmed that the child was brought in dead and already cold,” he said.

According to Adekunle, the suspect later admitted at the police station that the child had been beaten, although he allegedly insisted the assault was not severe enough to cause her death.

Following a report lodged at the Igando Police Division, officers visited the scene, arrested the couple and recovered the child's body.

A police source told our correspondent that preliminary findings indicated that the victim was already dead before she was taken to the hospital, contradicting claims that she died while receiving treatment.

The case has since been transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department, Panti, for further investigation.

A child far from home

Investigations revealed that the victim was brought to Lagos from Ebonyi State about six months earlier. She was said to be the daughter of the female suspect's elder sister.

Despite this, neighbours alleged that she was treated differently from the couple's biological children.

"The couple moved in about two years ago, and the girl was brought about six months ago. They have two children, one about eight months old and the other about three years old. She took good care of her own children but treated the girl badly.

"She did not allow her to go to school. The girl looked malnourished and no different from children who beg on the streets. Although most of us did not know they were beating her until we saw her corpse, there were marks on her body," a resident familiar with the incident told our correspondent.

For residents still trying to process the tragedy, the experience remains deeply unsettling.

"I have never seen anything like this before. To think that we were all here while something like this was happening is shocking," the source lamented.

It was also gathered that the child's mother had vowed to confront the suspect over the incident.

"Someone believed to be their relative came to our compound some days ago and was asking if the girl was truly maltreated. I confirmed it and told him everything that had happened. Then he said what she is facing now is nothing compared to what they would do to her when she returns to Ebonyi," the source added.

As investigations continue, residents and concerned individuals have continued to demand justice for the young girl whose life ended in such tragic circumstances.

For now, the compound stands as a haunting reminder that behind closed doors, unimaginable acts can occur unnoticed, especially to the most vulnerable.

The state Police Public Relations Officer, Abimbola Adebisi, could not be reached for updates on the incident as calls made to her phones were not responded to. A text message sent to her had yet to be replied to as of the time of filing this report.