

FEATURE

Mother of three suffocates own baby to death inside polythene bag

A 31-year old mother of three recently caused a stir in the Ikeja area of Lagos State, when she allegedly suffocated her day-old baby to death inside a polythene bag.

From Nurudeen Oyewole, Lagos

The sad look on the faces of mourners who had gathered in front of Hugo Medical Centre Ikeja, told it all. Mostly women, they were in groups of three, four, and five, discussing among themselves in hushed tones. Yet there were a few others whose emotion wouldn't allow them to lower their voices. These were the ones, who poured abuses and also placed curses on a woman they all alleged, had deliberately killed her new born baby in an incredible circumstance.

The situation was no where different inside the hospital. Upon sighting this correspondent, two nurses and a man who later identified himself as Dr Ade Aragbaye, rushed forward. They pointed to a woman, who hardly gave any sign as someone who had just delivered a baby, on a chair, saying: "Mr Journalist, welcome. There she sits, the murderer. She just killed her son. You can as well come with us and have a look."

Right on a bed inside the baby's ward was a polythene bag. One could have mistaken it for any other polythene bag out there. But as the doctor attempted to open it, it dawned on all that there was another polythene bag inside, which had been sealed.

"This was exactly how they brought it here," the doctor said as he brought the inner polythene bag out, and opened its content. In it lay the body of a lifeless day-old baby boy who was still covered with his own blood and the placenta.

A man, who apparently had sneaked behind the doctor and the journalist to catch a glimpse of the dead baby, gave himself out when he shouted upon seeing the corpse. He immediately turned, rushed to where the baby's mother was and slapped her. "Do you see what you have done? Do you see it?" he asked repeatedly as he also wept. Other sympathizers however took him out of the scene.

"But believe me I didn't kill the baby. How can I kill the baby I gave birth to myself?" Mabel Ahmedu, the 31-year-old mother of the dead baby said, even as the nurses and doctor shouted at her to pose with the baby's corpse for a photograph.

Those who were harsh on Mabel might not be blamed. The inconsistency in her narration of what transpired, and the different accounts of her neighbours, all gave her out as someone who was simply being smart by half.

"This is not the first time I would be



■ Mabel Ahmedu with the deceased child.

pregnant. Already, I have three kids all of whom are staying with me in my mother's house. For a very long time, I didn't even know that I was pregnant with this baby, because I was still having my 'monthly period' regularly. I was hawking my wares around Oba Akran road in Ikeja, when I went into labour. I gave birth to the baby in front of a bank in Ikeja. The baby didn't even cry when I eventually gave birth to it. One of the women passers-by who saw me, advised that I should put him in a polythene bag so as not to allow him freeze on account of the cold.

"I wanted to bring him to the hospital from there. But I was stopped on the road by people who accused me of wanting to go and throw the baby away in the canal. It was from there I was taken to the Police station, and the police asked me to write a statement, before allowing me to come to the hospital. The baby died in the hospital here," Mabel narrated.

Yet the doctor's account and that of the eye witnesses are different in many ways.

"I was somewhere when I was called that a woman has given birth to a baby on her own, and that she needs medical attention. So I rushed down here. On getting here, I discovered that the baby was inside a polythene bag. That first surprised me. But I brought the baby out and I was able to analyse that the baby was not breathing well, so I tried to massage and carried out a resuscitation effort on him for about 30 minutes. That proved abortive as the baby later died.

"After that I came out and met some sympathizers who gathered outside the hospital, and were pointing accusing fingers at the woman for deliberately suffocating the baby. The eye witnesses said when the woman gave birth in front of the bank, some sympathizers went to inform the bank officials of what had happened. But before the officials could come out, the woman was said to have

put the baby in the polythene bag and left the scene. They eventually saw her at a distance, ran towards her, and offered to give her a cloth to wrap the baby. But we were told she bluntly refused, and it was at that point they suspected she had the intention of killing the baby.

"They eventually brought her to the hospital here. And it was after it was confirmed that the baby is dead that we now took her to the police station to report her. There, she told them that she didn't stay anywhere around here, but at far away Ijaiye. She also told them at the station that she had only one baby. But someone among the crowd eventually identified her as Mama Okiki. It was the person who later revealed that her residence was just five houses away from this hospital, and that she actually has three and not one baby. As you can see, despite losing the baby, she has shown no remorse. Apparently she didn't want the baby all the while, and has succeeded in her mission to get him killed," Dr Aragbaye said.

Dr Aragbaye also posed three questions to Mabel, none of which she was able to offer a coherent answer. "Why will you



■ Dr Ade Aragbaye

put a new born in two polythene bags and even sealed the inner one? Two, when you were approached by sympathizers who asked you to put the baby in a wrapper, why did you refuse? And why did you give conflicting information about yourself, when apparently there was no reason for that?"

More astonishing about Mabel is the fact that all her neighbours denied ever knowing she was pregnant. About four of them who came to the hospital to see for themselves, were all astonished, while some others were weeping, saying they could not believe what they were seeing. Others simply queried her ingenuity in keeping the pregnancy out of people's view for nine months. Though the doctor said it is very

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possible to do so, especially if the woman has been using a pregnancy girdle or abortion belt. But Mabel denied ever using a girdle, insisting that she had always had a small stomach anytime she got pregnant.

Asked what she intends telling the father of the baby, Mabel said she has no intention of telling him because in the first instance they are no longer in good terms.

"We are not together. There is no point telling him," she said.

A source among Mabel's neighbours however confided in the correspondent that Mabel might actually be ashamed of her predicament, because already she has three children with whom she is still staying, in her mother's house. Having the fourth one in the same place might also prove catastrophic to her.

At the house, which was actually a stone-throw from the hospital, it was said that Mabel's mother had gone out for her daily business. Mabel's younger siblings approached to say one or two things about their sister, declined, saying she has always been a disgrace to the family.

At the Wemabod police station where the incident was reported, the officer on duty confirmed the lodgment of a complaint, and told the reporter that the matter is already being investigated, but they want the hospital management to discharge the woman before they can swing into full investigation.