

SPECIAL REPORT

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Wanted: A united front against brutal killing of women, girls

Despite being underreported due to stigma, societal norms, and systemic failures, femicide (killing of female) has become alarming nationwide. The incidents are not isolated. They have become part of a broader pattern fueled by gender inequality, socio-cultural barriers, and a flawed criminal justice system. Assistant News Editor/Head Security Desk, **PRECIOUS IGBONWELUNDU** reports.

Background

When Yetunde Lawal left the venue of a naming ceremony she was attending on February 10, at the instance of her friend Abdulrahman Moh'd Bello, she had no inclination it was a journey of no return. Yetunde, a final-year student at the Kwara State College of Education in Ilorin, was eating, but she suddenly dropped her food and left hastily after a call from Abdulrahman, the friend she met and chatted with on Facebook. That was the last that was heard of her. Detectives later found parts of her dismembered body inside a bowl at Abdulrahman's residence at Offa Garage. The other parts had been trashed at a dumpsite in Ilorin. Her remains were recovered after her call log was tracked following a missing person report filed by her parents.

Like Yetunde, Salome Adaidu, a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member serving in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), was beheaded by her boyfriend, Timileyin Ajayi, at Agwan Sarki Orozo in Nasarawa State. The suspect was apprehended by members of a nearby church who saw him moving around suspiciously to drop a bag in the river. He confessed to have killed and beheaded his lover of almost a year.

Last month, the husband of Chioma Nwanna doused her with petrol and set her ablaze at their Abagana, Anambra State residence. She wailed: "Nnem of ije di ebuewu" meaning "My mother, marriage has killed me", as she writhed in pain. Chioma, a mother of six, suffered first degree burns. She died in the hospital she was rushed to that night. Her husband was detained after he turned himself in to the police.

These are few of the hundreds of femicide cases recorded across the country since 2020. From the deserts and mountainous hamlets up north to the mangroves and riverine communities down south, women and girls remain vulnerable victims of senseless killings. Whether at home, worship and workplaces, or even in full public glare, chilling details of women raped and/or killed by their partners, relatives, estranged lovers, colleagues and even total strangers are awash in the media. They are harsh reminders of the dangerous reality women face - platonic friendship, rejection of love advances, job seeking or even hanging out with friends could mean their unexpected and gruesome end.

Statistics

Globally, the statistics paint a grim picture, with over 89,000 women killed in 2022, the highest number recorded in 20 years. Also in 2023, a joint report by the United Nations (UN) Women and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), revealed that 85,000 women and girls were killed, with 60 per cent of the atrocities committed by intimate partners or relatives.

The report added that while overall homicide numbers started to decline globally after a peak in 2021, that of femicide was not decreasing.

A breakdown of the statistics indicates that at least one female is killed every 10 minutes, or 140 women and girls lose their lives to inten-



•Lawal



•Osedion



•Idowu



•Ayanwale



•Damilola

tional murder daily. According to the report, Africa recorded the highest rates of intimate partner and family-related femicide in 2023, followed by the Americas and Oceania.

In Nigeria, 401 women reportedly died from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in 2022 alone. The government acknowledged over 27,000 recorded cases of SGBV in the past three years.

Data obtained from the DOHS Femicide Dashboard, a live tracker on cases and insights showed that there have been 135 incidents of femicide resulting to 149 deaths in 2024. From the data, majority of the women (26.7%) were strangled to death, the method of killing was not specified in 23.7% cases, 11.9% were beaten to death, 11.1% died from stabbing, 4.4% were poisoned and 3% were shot dead. It also showed that most of the victims (20%) were killed by their boyfriends; those responsible for 17% of the cases were unspecified; 13.3% were killed by acquaintances; 8.9% were murdered by their husbands; 7.4% by intimate partners; 7.4% of the perpetrators were the sons of the victims, 4.4% were neighbours and 3% of the culprits were unknown assailants.

Other instances

Like scenes from a horror movie, a grim tableau of decomposing bodies, dismembered human body parts, and emaciated survivors, many of whom were women, was revealed in March 2014 following the uncovering of a hu-

man slaughterhouse inside the Soka Forest in Ibadan, Oyo State. The victims were mostly kidnapped individuals, especially women who were tortured, trafficked and in some cases murdered. Despite the magnitude of the discovery, concrete arrests and prosecutions were limited, leaving many questions unanswered.

Another heartrending femicide was the brutal rape and murder of a 22-year-old University of Benin microbiology student, Uwaila Omozuwa, inside a Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) parish in June 2020.

Omozuwa, who was a member of the choir, saw the church as a safe place to study following the lockdown occasioned by the Corona virus pandemic. But she was found lifeless, lying half-naked in a pool of her own blood after being attacked by a murderous gang.

The news of the killing of Iniubong Umoren, a young applicant lured with a fake job offer to Uyo, the Akwa Ibom State capital, also went viral, causing disquiet nationwide. Her remains were buried in shallow graves, with some of her body parts missing.

The case of Oluwabamise Ayanwale, 22, who was killed inside a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) vehicle which she boarded in Lagos Island was awash in the media. The driver, Andrew Ominikoron, is standing trial for her death. Her mutilated body was reportedly thrown out of the moving bus.

Last December 24, one Charity, was allegedly beaten to death by her husband for roast-

ing instead of cooking a tuber of yam. On October 4, last year, a six-month pregnant woman was stabbed multiple times, in Ikorodu, Lagos, for alleged infidelity. The assailant then set the house on fire.

On September 11, a 20-year-old undergraduate, Paul Jeremiah, was arrested by the Kogi State Police Command for allegedly kidnapping and killing a Federal University of Lokoja (FUL) fresher, he met and befriended within a week.

Jeremiah, who confessed to collecting ₦400,000 ransom from the teenager's parents, proceeded to strangle her, severed her eyes, tongue, lungs, intestine, and some part of her buttocks as demanded by his Ibadan, Oyo State based witch doctor for ritual purposes.

That same September, Christiana Idowu, a Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Ogun State, undergraduate was kidnapped in Lagos and subsequently murdered by a childhood friend, who removed some of her body parts and allegedly buried the rest at his father's compound in Ikorodu. The suspect, who is remained at the Kiri Kiri Maximum Custodial facility of the Nigeria Correctional Service (NCS), was alleged to have previously killed other women in similar fashion whose decapitated and decomposing bodies were allegedly dug out at the same residence following his arrest by troops of 174 Battalion, Ikorodu.

In Kano State, Sa'adatu Ibrahim was killed in cold blood by her lover of one week, last July for refusing his marriage proposal on the ground that their relationship was still new.

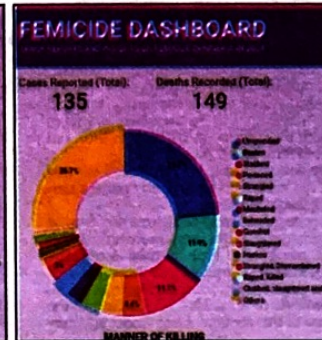
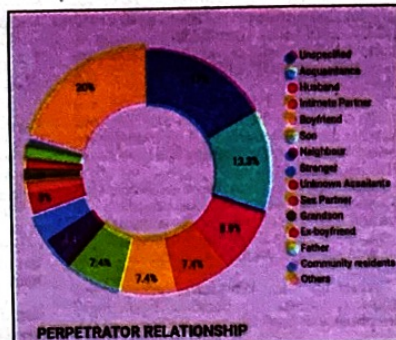
One Habibat was beaten to death by her husband in Lagos over allegations of infidelity.

Similarly, in March 2024, a tragic incident unfolded in Ondo when a man stabbed his wife to death following an argument over the woman's occasional visit to her ex-husband's house to see her child. He attacked the woman with a pair of scissors, stabbing her on the neck and stomach, and set her body ablaze.

On April 27, one Arinola was stabbed to death by her husband over alleged infidelity. Ocheze Ogbonna, a crane operator in Abia State, was pushed to her death by a foreign colleague after reportedly rejecting his love advances.

Also, Celine Nduim and her Ghanaian friend, Afiba Tandoh went missing last April

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after visiting one Andrew Amaechi Ochekwu in Aba, Abia State. The man was later killed by police operatives when he attempted to escape from custody following his arrest for alleged serial murder of women.

On July 13, twenty-one-year-old Augusta was allegedly murdered by her lover, Benjamin. The suspect fled after committing the heinous crime at his Oral Estate residence in Ajah, Lagos State.

In October 2023, a man identified as Collins was arrested following the alleged murder of his female partner, a 300-level undergraduate at the University of Port Harcourt, Justina Nkang.

Why femicide persists

Indeed, the targeted killing of women did not start today. This atrocity which is deeply rooted in power structure that discriminates against women and motivated by the offenders' perception of superiority, dates back to time immemorial.

Enabled by ingrained socio-cultural norms that fuel patriarchy and a criminal justice system which has failed to recognise and adequately punish the crime, perpetrators and their supporters have been encouraged to continue this unchecked and despicable violence that leads to the killing of their victims in the most horrific, gory and unimaginable ways.

Although femicide is often as a result of cyclical violence perpetuated against women and girls before their death, there seem to be a nexus between femicide, ritual killings, and organ trafficking especially in Nigeria. This is because most of the reported cases have shown a pattern of the dismemberment of the body parts of victims by the perpetrators. Many of those arrested claimed that they either wanted to use their victims for rituals or sell the parts. Experts believe that deeply rooted cultural, economic, and social factors, superstitious beliefs and the pursuit of quick wealth or power are driving individuals to commit these atrocities, with vulnerable women, often the target.

They opine that the commercialisation of human body parts, especially those of women, for rituals or organ trade has exacerbated the issue, creating a lucrative black market for these crimes.

A pathologist with the Nigeria Police Force, Dr. Samuel Keshinro, an Assistant Commissioner (ACP), told The Nation that the reason for femicide was multifactorial, ranging from the patriarchal societal norms, unreasonable misogynistic attitude, mental health issues of perpetrators to gender inequality experienced by the victims.

To Keshinro, recurrent violence against the victim is a common trigger sign to watch out for, to avoid the dastardly act of femicide. Regular intoxication with alcohol and/or controlled substances can predispose violence and eventual femicide, he added.

According to the Chief Operations Officer, DOHS Care Foundation, Mrs. Ololade Ajayi, the nonrecognition of the crime of femicide by Nigerian laws was partly responsible for its persistence, stressing that the husband of a domestic violence victim who dies should be investigated for femicide.

Ajayi also attributed the persistence of the crime to the culture of victim blaming, which she said emboldens perpetrators by taking the onus of responsibility off them.

"Many people have found love on dating sites, why should it be turned to a den for bloodletting for women and girls? There is a community of incel online, especially on X and other social media platforms that actively begins to blame victims when femicide happens."

"What they are doing is to signify to the perpetrator that it's ok, you have a community here supporting and defending you, and that is why you see perpetrators begin to feed into the narrative they are putting out."

"They did it with Augusta Oseodion who



•Bello



•Umoren



•Alkpabio



•Egbetokun

was murdered in 2023 and even recently with the woman who was burnt to death by her husband in Abagana, Anambra State.

"Also, the absence of a law on femicide is definitely contributing to the crime. Perpetrators are not aptly punished," she said.

Challenges in curbing the menace

Tracking data on femicide is quite challenging, time and finance consuming, which many organisations—public and private—have limited resources to attend to. When a case of suspected femicide is recorded, forensic experts or pathologists have to be brought into the picture to conduct detailed examinations some of which include taking DNA samples that are flown abroad and cross matching results with those in the biometric databases to possibly identify a suspect not yet in custody, which do not come cheap.

To Dr. Keshinro, manpower shortage and training needs were part of the challenges faced by law enforcement officers in identifying and preventing or curbing the menace.

"Too few investigators or specialised homicide officers; inadequate specialised medical doctors or pathologists that can conduct autopsies—an important procedure to medically ascertain cause of death which is necessary to identify femicide and/or prosecute offenders."

"Also, cultural norms tend towards 'resolving' femicide cases within the family to avoid bringing 'disrepute' to the members, as well as inadequate awareness on triggers to look out for to avoid femicides," he said.

The challenge, to him, was not the absence of law but the enforcement and procedures surrounding the prosecution.

"I am sure there are laws against any type of illegal killing of another person including this specially recognised type termed femicides. Section 319 of the Criminal Code Act in Nigeria states the punishment for murder (male or female homicide or femicide - (1) 'Subject to the provisions of this section of this Code, any per-



•Nduim with Tandoh



•Nkang



•Rachael

son who commits the offence of murder shall be sentenced to death."

To Ajayi, "we need funding to follow up on cases to get details especially in rural areas and follow up with judgment in these cases. We need to reach more communities in terms of awareness. Also, there is a lot of hostility online when we post these cases, femicide deniers and Incels come at us with a lot of vitriol."

How delayed justice exacerbates PTSD for victims' relatives

For relatives of victims of femicide, the sorrow of losing their loved ones under such circumstances could have lessened if they had gotten justice. But their pains have been worsened with feeling of helplessness, anxiety and frustration, no thanks to the delays in administering justice. For instance, most of the cases in the report were still pending in court, awaiting trial or still under investigation, years after the crime was committed, thus denying the relatives much-needed closure.

At the DOHS memorial for victims of femicide held on November 30 at the National Stadium in Surulere, some relatives of femicide victims shared how the absence of justice had exacerbated their Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

One of the relatives was Damilola Ayanwale, the elder sister of Bamishe Ayanwale. She recalled with nostalgia how loving her younger sister, whose birthday coincidentally, was the same day as the event, November 30.

"My sister was a sweet soul, whose life was unnecessarily cut short. Our family has been made to go through this prolonged grief as we are yet to get justice since 2022 despite the arrest of one of the major suspected perpetrators of the murder."

"I was there in the laboratory at the Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH) when they collected specimen from Bamishe's body. I saw when they were inserting something into her private parts. I asked what it was, and I was told they were taking a sample to determine if she was raped. It was also supposed to show the DNA of the person or people who raped her."

"But till date, we haven't heard or seen any results concerning the specimen that they took from her body. We were told it would be taken abroad for the test, but nothing has been heard till today. It is saddening."

She also lamented that the other accomplices of Omonikoron who he claimed boarded the bus and forced him to divert his route at gunpoint, before allegedly raping, robbing and killing Bamishe were yet to be apprehended years later.

"Where are they? Why have they not been produced? Where are Bamishe's belongings? Her phone, her bag? We were told she had ev-

erything she needed to present to the mother of the unborn baby, who is my brother's wife. She had even sewn clothes for the baby. Where are all these things?"

"The family's experience in seeking justice for Bamishe has been challenging and frustrating. We have faced multiple adjournments in court, which have delayed the justice process. The family feels that the government has not done enough to investigate the case and bring the perpetrators to justice," she lamented.

Law enforcement and the quest for justice Although femicide is not known as a distinct crime under the laws of the country, the police must be commended for taking steps towards curbing all forms of gender-based violence and ensuring adequate data storage. The crime analysis record obtained by our Correspondent from the police headquarters in the course of this investigation showed that a total of 17,415 SGBV cases were recorded last year. Of the number, 17,306 were investigated, 15,792 charged to court but only 2,758 convictions were secured.

Just last week, Inspector-General of Police (IGP) Olukayode Egbetokun directed the expansion of gender offices in all divisions across the country. Prior to this directive, the police only had gender offices at the state, zonal commands and force headquarters.

With the establishment of police gender offices at all the divisions, SGBV victims can get timely help before their situations worsen.

Also, the IGP directed that only qualified officers should man the gender desks, adding that they will have to undergo specialised trainings to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise to effectively handle such cases.

"This integration is designed to provide a holistic approach to handling gender-based violence and related cases, fostering a supportive environment for victims and ensuring swift justice delivery." The strengthening of the GBV desk offices underscores the Nigeria Police Force's commitment to safeguarding the rights of victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

"It is a proactive response to the increasing need for focused resources and specialised interventions to protect vulnerable populations."

"The IGP urges all citizens to report incidents of violence and take advantage of these desk offices to seek justice and protection."

"The Nigeria Police Force remains steadfast in its mission to uphold justice, ensuring that all citizens' rights and freedoms are protected without discrimination or bias," said Police spokesman, ACP Oluwayiwa Adejobi in a statement.

Read the concluding portion at www.thenationonlineng.net



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