

# Court suspends judgment as rape victim, uncle, two others die

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• Scene of the accident

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Tragedy struck on the Benin-Auchi Expressway in Edo State on Wednesday after a 17-year-old pregnant rape victim, her uncle, an advocacy officer identified as Promise Ezekiel, and their driver, Paul Opashe, were killed in a road crash.

PUNCH *Metro* learnt that the victims were travelling in a car to the Evbuoraria Magistrates' Court, Benin, where judgment was to be delivered in a case involving the teenager's father when a truck rammed into their vehicle.

The fifth occupant of the car was said to be in a critical condition in the hospital.

Our correspondent gathered that there was confusion on the court premises when the Investigating Police Officer broke the news of the tragedy.

The magistrate and those who had gathered to witness the ruling, reportedly broke down in tears, as all matters slated for hearing that day were postponed.

It was learnt that the deceased advocacy officer, Ezekiel, and the survivor worked with a non-governmental organisation, the Brave Heart Initiative.

In a reaction to the tragedy, *PUNCH Metro* gathered that the NGO had shut down indefinitely.

Our correspondent learnt that the teenager was allegedly defiled by her father, identified as Jacob Alonge, aka *Ariver*, many times in their house in the Akoko Edo area of Edo State.

Alonge, 54, who was reputed to possess diabolical powers, was alleged to have aborted the first pregnancy that resulted from the incest.

The Brave Heart Initiative, in a statement it issued after agreeing to take up the case in December 2018, had said the bubble burst after the girl was impregnated the second time.

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“The Brave Heart Initiative’s current case involves a 17-year-old girl, who had been serially abused by her biological father. The father is known to possess diabolical powers and engages in fetish practices.

“The mother has been largely absent in her life, and the victim has a lot of social issues with a complicated mental health history.

“Her father shaved her hair as a threat of death if she disclosed the sexual abuse, and made her to swear to keep the secret. She, therefore, endured all the abuse in secrecy.

“He impregnated her last year (2017) and aborted the pregnancy via local concoctions. She is pregnant again and was finally able to confide in a relative. The community has risen in her defence. The suspect (her father) was apprehended by the community’s vigilance group and the police arrested him. The case is being prepared for further investigation and prosecution.

“The scan conducted revealed that the girl is 21 weeks’ pregnant. The Brave Heart Initiative will be registering her for antenatal and hopes to secure a better household for her until childbirth.”

The founder of the NGO, Priscilla Usiobaifo, in a series of posts on the case on *Facebook*, had lamented the mental condition of the 17-year-old, praying for her full recovery.

On January 11, 2019, she announced that the case had been adjourned till January 16 for judgment.

She called on her friends and other NGOs to join in witnessing the judgement.

Around 6am on the D-day, she said she had a foreboding, which she could not explain.

Usiobaifo had stated, “No matter the outcome of this court judgment today, it will have an everlasting effect on this teenage girl.

“It is traumatic to see your biological father in the dock and witness him being sentenced for a criminal act!

“I feel very deeply about the pathetic case of this teenage girl and engage in heartfelt prayers for her full recovery.

“I have supported over 100 sexual abuse survivors, but I feel very different about this particular case.”

*PUNCH Metro* learnt that the victim, her uncle, the NGO worker, and the man who drove them did not reach the court.

Usiobaifo told our correspondent on the telephone on Thursday that they all died in the crash.

She said, “The court was waiting for them to arrive when the IPO broke the news of the accident. The magistrate and everybody were devastated and they postponed everything. The survivor is still unstable in the hospital.

“They were all in a car when a truck rammed them. The accident happened between 7.30am and 8am at Ewu on the Auchi-Benin Road. There were four casualties in all: the victim, her uncle, my advocacy officer and the driver.”

The founder of Project Alert on Violence against Women and Girls, another NGO, Mrs Josephine Effah-Chukwuma, lamented the hazards that organisations rendering humanitarian services were exposed to without commensurate benefits.

She said Usiobaifo, who is in her early 30s, had been plunged into emotional and financial crises while attempting to help a victim of abuse.

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