

How SARS men robbed, maimed us, killed our loved ones -Victims, relations

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As teeming youths across the country protest against police brutality, some Nigerians have lamented their unsavoury experiences and extrajudicial killings of their loved ones at the hands of operatives of the now defunct Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force.

In separate interviews with *Saturday PUNCH*, some Nigerians shared their experiences on the overzealous behaviour of the SARS officers.

An entrepreneur, Solomon Obodeh, spoke about how his younger brother, Benson Obodeh, in Benin City, Edo State, was allegedly killed by SARS men in 2015.

According to Solomon, as of the time of Benson's death, he was a student and car dealer.

"He was picked up from his house on May 21, 2015 by officers of SARS. Four of them came into Benin City, Edo State, from Ikeja, Lagos, on the suspicion that they tracked a phone to a mechanic, whose name was Evans and who happened to be my younger brother's mechanic that helped him repair cars.

"In the course of torture, seeing that he was about to die, they collected his house key, car and the N200,000 my in-law gave him to deposit in the bank on the day he was arrested.

"The SARS officers collected that money but that wasn't enough; they still collected his ATM card and the PIN. There was N332,000 in his account. They withdrew a total of N330,000 from the account," he said.

A hairstylist, Mrs Hannah Olugbodi, who was shot by SARS operatives on June 6, 2018, also noted that though she had undergone three operations, she could not walk without crutches.

Olugbodi's husband, Seun, also told one of our correspondents that they had fallen into debt after spending N1.5m, though she had to undergo additional surgical procedures.

Similarly, many people have been giving accounts of how they or their loved ones were brutalised or killed by SARS.

For instance, on Twitter, Obi Joseph whose handle is @obijoseph_c, shared screenshots of a WhatsApp status of a loved one, saying, "OmakaChukwu Henry, my senior brother, was one of SARS victims. He was a final-year student of Marketing Department, Ebonyi State University. He was killed by SARS on June 14, 2013.

"SARS made my dad sign a document that he would never ask what killed his first son in his lifetime before he could (collect) his remains for our family. He was buried on December 14, 2013. After that year, my dad had a stroke that he suffered for seven years before he died, and never asked how his son was killed - the child of his youth."

Somto Onuchukwu, whose handle is @chosensomto, also lamented the death of a loved one identified as Chijioke Ifloanya, who was allegedly killed by a SARS operative.

Onuchukwu said, "A former OC SARS Awkum (Anambra State), killed Chijioke Ifloanya, and told his parents to their faces that 'Nothing will happen.' If nothing

happens to him (SARS operative), then we protested for nothing. I call on all Nigerians to retweet and tweet until we get justice!"

Tammy Halliday, with the handle @tammyhalliday, also posted a photo of a protester, saying, "We have all stereotyped him. DJ Kaka schooled in Ghana. SARS killed his twin, made him spend 54 months in prison, took his car, and almost killed him too after they killed his twin. He was allowed to do his thing in the protest; he had such a free spirit that he could share anything."

Chidiogo, whose handle is @bkinetix, tweeted, "I remember years ago, my cousin bought a car without prior knowledge that it had been stolen. SARS Awka arrested, tortured and forced him to make a confession that he was an armed robber. They showed us the confession on video and told us he had been killed (that it was their new order).

"They came to our house to search for a gun, as they claimed he kept one. He was living with us at that time. We cried, but his family eventually called one or two influential people. Guess the biggest shock. He was not dead after all! According to him, they took them to an unknown forest, while blindfolded.

"In the midst of this forest was a building with lots of young men, who were summoned and killed one after the other. He wasn't quite sure if it was only for organ harvesting and/or rituals! Young men are kidnapped or killed by SARS and trafficked!"

The tweeter stated that their cousin was traumatised and forced to leave Awka.

Another Twitter user, whose handle is @ChargieKosowo, said, "SARS killed my cousin, early 2019. She was 33, had a husband and two children. They left her body in their pickup, under the rain, for hours. This happened on Eric Moore Road (Surulere, Lagos State). She was just going home to meet her kids. I miss you, Ronke."

@hnebold said, "Today (Friday) marks 10 years since SARS took my cousin who was 15 years old, saying he stole. Before we could get to Esigie Police Station, Benin, we were told that he had been killed and buried. The only evidence we got was his slippers on the supposed grave."

"This same police station arrested our young boys and me, aged 11 to 17. Our only offence was to play a game store on our street to going to Play Station 1 and 3."

On February 22, 2020, 22-year-old Remo Stars Football Club defender, Tamiyu Kazem, aka Kaka, was reportedly crushed by a hit-and-run driver on the Sagamu-Abeokuta Expressway while being taken to the SARS office on Saturday.

While the police claimed he jumped out of the vehicle and was crushed by an oncoming vehicle, an eyewitness, Sanni Abubakar, said he was pushed out.

Also, a graduate, Ifeoma Abugu, on September 10, was allegedly murdered four days after her 'introduction' by SARS men, who whisked her away after storming the residence of her fiancé, Afam Ugwuwa, at Wumba village in the Lokogoma area of Abuja to arrest him.

In the same vein, a video went viral on October 3, in which eyewitnesses said FSARS operatives allegedly shot a young man in front of a hotel in Ughelli, Delta State and drove his SUV

away, sparking nationwide outrage.

Two days later, Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo expressed anger over the actions of some policemen, especially those attached to SARS, whom he accused of harassing and, sometimes, maiming and killing Nigerians nationwide.

But the Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria Police Force, DCP Frank Mba, said SARS could not be scrapped because of the ongoing fight against crimes in the country.

Thousands of youths flooded cities across the country, calling for justice against power-drunk and trigger-happy policemen. The public outcry gained global attention with Nigerian and international celebrities, including Kanye West, John Boyega and Trey Songz, supporting the #EndSARS protests on social media.

The demonstrations received a boost from Nigerians in the Diaspora who took to the streets in the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa and Canada, among others, to protest police brutality and demand police reforms.

In response, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu, on October 11, announced the disbandment of the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police Force, adding that the operatives would be redeployed to other police formations and commands.

The President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), on Monday, said the disbandment of the police unit was a first step to "extensive police reforms."

Buhari, in an address delivered in a Twitter video, stated that officials of the disbanded team found to be responsible for wrongful acts would be brought to justice, adding that he had ordered a probe into the killing of Isiaha Jimoh, who he described as "the young man in Oyo State," during the recent protests.

The President said, "Meanwhile, it is important to recognise that the vast majority of men and women of the police force are hard-working and diligent in performing their duties. The few bad eggs should not be allowed to tarnish the image and reputation of the force."

Amid the protests across Nigeria, young Jimoh was reportedly killed by a trigger-happy policeman in Ogbomosho last Saturday, with seven others sustaining varying degrees of injury.

Confirming Jimoh's death, the Oyo State Governor, Seyi Makinde, via his Twitter account, described the situation as regrettable and promised that investigation would be carried out into the incident.

Makinde said the killing and assault on peaceful protesters were an indication of government failure, urging the residents to carry on with their protests peacefully.

Several protesters were injured, while others were arrested during demonstrations around the country.

Pastor Sam Adeyemi of the Daystar Christian Centre in Lagos State, on Saturday evening, warned against clamping down on protesters seeking an end to police brutality and extortion in Nigeria.

Global rights group, Amnesty International, on Monday, said to protesters had been killed by the Nigeria Police Force since the #EndSARS demonstrations began penultimate Thursday.

In Rivers State, Governor Nyesom Wike, on Monday, banned #EndSARS protests in the state. But as hundreds of youths in the state defiantly took to the streets

the following day, the governor was forced to join them.

Wike, while addressing the protesters, stated that though he was not in support of the Tuesday protest, no other governor in the country had protested against the security outfit as he had done.

In Lagos State, gridlock has since become a permanent fixture around Lekki toll gate on the busy Lekki-Epe Expressway and the Lagos State House of Assembly in Alausa, Ikeja due to daily demonstrations.

Two Road in Oyo State was also subdued by protesters on Tuesday morning. A similar scenario played out on Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, the country's busiest road, on Friday.

The protesters' demands include psychological evaluation and retraining of all disbanded SARS officers before their redeployment. Others are the release of all arrested protesters, justice for all deceased victims of police brutality and appropriate compensation for their families.

Also, the protesters want

increased salaries for police officers as well as the establishment of an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reports of police misconduct.

A human rights lawyer, Mr. Femi Falana, on Wednesday, argued that if the Federal Government was negotiating with terrorists and kidnappers, it should also dialogue with the protesters. He also called on the IGP to order his men to protect #EndSARS protesters from attacks by hoodlums.

Senior Pastor of the Covenant Christian Centre, Lagos, Pastor Poju Oyemade, on Thursday, narrated how his wife, Toyin, was arrested and detained by SARS officers in 2019 for "flimsy" reasons.

The cleric, in a Facebook post, noted that, while it took "personal recognition" and "social capital" to get her released, some Nigerians who did not have people of influence to come to their rescue had suffered dehumanising treatments at the hands of SARS officers.

Similarly, the Ooni of Ife,

Adeyeye Ogunwusi, while endorsing the ongoing protest against brutality and extortion by SARS operatives, on Monday, tweeted that his 25-year-old daughter once had a nasty experience with men of the recently disbanded police unit.

The monarch, therefore, stated that he was happy that the youths of Nigeria were finally standing up for their rights.

Also, the Nigerian Bar Association, on Tuesday, urged the Federal Government to show sincerity in its disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad by throwing open all SARS detention centres.

The NBA president, Mr. Oluamide Akpata, who made the call at a press conference in Abuja, listed some of SARS' infamous detention centres in the country as Abuja 'human abattoir' and the squad's detention centres in Lagos and Port Harcourt.

Akpata called for a comprehensive audit of all detention centres of the scrapped squad to take stock of detainees.

PSC to dismiss 37 ex-SARS officers, prosecute 24 for misconduct

Adelani Adepegba, Abuja

No fewer than 37 former members of the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad have been recommended for dismissal from service.

The Police Service Commission is also expected to order the prosecution of 24 other ex-SARS operatives for various acts of professional misconduct.

#EndSARS: We're sorry for being silent, Osinbajo begs youths

Jesusegun Alagbe

Vice-President Yemi Osinbajo on Friday apologised to the youths for keeping silent and having not done enough to stop police brutality in the country.

This is as #EndSARS protesters held candlelight sessions for victims of SARS/police brutality in several cities like Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Ibadan.

Osinbajo, in a Twitter thread, via his verified handle @ProfOsinbajo, admitted that the feelings of anger and frustration by young Nigerians were justified.

He said several meetings had been held with government officials and actions were being taken, including the disbanding of SARS, to compensate for the injustice suffered at the hands of errant officers.

He wrote, "Dear Nigerians, I know that many of you are angry, and understandably so. We could've moved faster and for this we are sorry."

"I fully understand how many young people feel. Many feel that we have been too silent and have simply not done enough. These feelings of frustration are justified."

There are far too many people who have been brutalised at the hands of the police and this is unacceptable. We must take responsibility for protecting young people, even sometimes from those

These were the highlights of the report of the Presidential Panel on Reform of SARS set up by the Federal Government in 2018 to reform the dreaded unit.

The presidential panel had, among other things, investigated allegations of human rights violations and abuse of office against SARS and recommended reform or restructuring of the outfit.

Presenting the report to the PSC Chairman, Musiliu Smith, in Abuja on Friday, the Executive Secretary

of the National Human Rights Commission, Tony Ojukwu, called for a speedy implementation of the panel recommendations.

A statement by the PSC spokesman, Ikechukwu Ani, said the PSC chairman had the capacity to deal appropriately with the report of the panel.

The statement was titled 'PSC to partner Human Rights Commission, promises immediate action on report of presidential panel on reform of SARS.'

"We have come to see a PSC determined to play a leading role in the reform of the Nigeria Police Force," Ojukwu was quoted to have said in the statement.

The NHRC boss noted that the reform was the most topical issue in the country at present, adding that a lot was expected from the commission.

He noted that the panel called for and received 113 complaints on alleged human rights violations from across the country and 22 memoranda on suggestions on how to reform and restructure SARS and the Nigeria Police in general.

The statement read, "Ojukwu said, at the end of the public hearing, the panel recommended 37 police officers for dismissal and 24 were recommended for prosecution."

Friday, October 16, 2020

212 new cases of
#COVID19Nigeria

Lagos	- 85
Oyo	- 72
FCT	- 21
Ogun	- 11
Plateau	- 11
Katsina	- 6
Kaduna	- 5
Osun	- 1

Confirmed	61,194
Discharged	32,394
Deaths	1,319