

How kidnappers chasing gang member over ransom killed my three-year-old son — Imo driver

A 65-year-old bus driver in Imo State, Paul Idamatam, tells **CHIDIEBUBE OKEOMA** how some gunmen believed to be kidnappers, chasing their gang member, shot his three-year-old son dead and left his six-year-old daughter with life-threatening gunshot injuries

Your children were shot by some kidnappers who recently went on the rampage at Afor Awo Omamma market. Tell us exactly how it happened?

Paschal, my only son, was killed on February 3 during the invasion of Afor Awo Omamma market by some kidnappers. He was three years old and he was in Nursery 1 at St. Patrick's School, Isieke, Awo Omamma. My daughter, Chidinma, is a six-year-old pupil of the same school. She was also shot on her chest and left hand. Paschal died but Chidinma was taken to the hospital where doctors battled to save her life.

Did the kidnappers shoot your children on purpose or were the children hit by stray bullets?

The kidnappers shot them on purpose.

Why was that?

My wife is a groundnut seller at the Afor Awo market. She had just brought the kids from school and moments later, there were consistent gunshots and people were running towards her stall in the market. It happened that some young men were chasing another young man and shooting at him while pursuing him. We later found out that a boy from Ubachima, a neighbouring village here, was the person that was being chased over some money that was said to be with him. He was chased from Ubachima Village to Isieke here into the Afor Awo Market. And while his gang members were chasing him, he ran towards my wife's shop, with blood gushing out from his body. Suddenly, one of the gang members looked towards my wife's shop and shot at my son in the chest. He also shot at my daughter in the chest and her hand and turned back and said sorry to my dead son. Their target abandoned his vehicle and ran away through the back door of the stall. And that was how my family became the biggest victim of the incident. I lost my only son; while my daughter is

in the hospital battling for her life.

Where were you when the incident happened and who told you about it?

That day, I didn't go to work. I was at home here when my wife took the children to school. Before they left, the boy told me to give his mom money for biscuit for them and I did. I never knew that was his last day.

Later in the evening, I was at the back of the house and I became worried when I did not see the children return from school. When I came to the front of the house, I started hearing some noise. Wondering what the matter was I came outside the gate. It was then that I saw people running from the market and saying that some gunmen invaded Afor Awo Market and were shooting people. I quickly stopped a commercial motorcyclist and told him to take me to the market to see that my wife was okay. But when I got to my wife's stall, I saw my son in a pool of his own blood. I saw that he was shot on the chest. My wife was not there and people told me that she had taken my daughter to the hospital. I practically



became mad.

What did you do then?

I later went to the hospital. The doctor insisted that we must bring a police report and deposit some money before treatment could commence on my six-year-old daughter. We then went to the police station to report the incident. But the policemen did not attend to us. They kept us waiting for almost one hour. It was not until my brother's wife shouted like a mad woman that one of them attended to us. The police will never change.

What then happened?

The police requested that I make a statement and sign that I would not pursue the matter anymore. My brothers in Lagos also called to advise that I should not pursue the matter. And that was how I signed that we didn't want to pursue the case anymore. Then my son's corpse was released to me for burial. And I buried him the following day, February 4, with a heavy heart.

Why did you agree with the police and

your brothers not to seek justice?

It was a family decision and I couldn't have said otherwise. Moreover, where would I get the money to pursue the matter (in court)? I believe that God will fight for us.

What is the name of the policeman who told you that you should drop the case?

It was already a family decision that we did not want to pursue any case. The policemen at the station only asked me to write a statement, stating that I do not want to pursue the case before they could release my son's corpse to me for burial.

Who told your brothers in Lagos about the incident and why did your brothers ask you not to pursue the case?

It was a sad news and the villagers and natives who live outside the village learnt about it immediately. My brothers who live in Lagos learnt about it and after a family meeting they decided to leave vengeance to God.

So, have you decided not to seek justice in this case?

It was a family decision. We made up our minds and that was why we made a statement at the police station to enable us to bury our son. We have left everything to God.

How much have you spent so far in treating your daughter who is the hospital and how is she now?

We have expended all we have. It was even my brothers who sent money to us for treatment to be commenced on my daughter. But now, we really need help, financially.

Do people know the shooters?

No. The only person people know is the one that was being pursued. I don't know his real name but people call him 'Orjiwuagu' and he is from Umuifa, Ubachima Awo Omamma here in the Oru East Local Government Area of Imo state. I also learnt that he recently returned from prison after spending seven years.

Do you know the reason why the man went to prison?

I don't even know him. It was after the incident that we learnt that he is from Ubachima village here in Awo Mmama. I don't know when and why he went to the prison.