

We work as construction sites labourers to survive after hoodlums killed our husbands – Widows of slain Anambra ASP, sergeant

An Assistant Superintendent of Police, Felix Okechukwu, and Sergeant Chinonye Nnanwa were killed by hoodlums while trying to restore law and order following a crisis that broke out between the Omor and Anaku communities of Anambra State in March last year. In these interviews with **IKENNA OBIANERI**, widows of the slain policemen lament that life has been difficult for them with no help or compensation in sight from police authorities

PLEASE introduce yourself.

I am Mrs Josephine Okechukwu. I am from Enugu State. I am 39 years old. I am a hairstylist. My husband, Okechukwu Felix Ngwu, is dead. He was an ASP. I have four children.

In what circumstances did your husband die?

They killed him last year in the course of duty. It was during a community crisis between the Omor and Anaku communities. As a policeman, he was deployed in the area. It was at the scene of the crisis that they killed him and set him ablaze.

On that particular Sunday, he left home to report for duty, only for him to call me later that they had asked him to go and restore law and order in those communities where there was a crisis. I didn't get to hear about his death until Tuesday, which was three days later, and from the information I gathered, he was attacked by a group of boys. I was told he was in his police uniform and the uniform must have made them to attack him.

You said you didn't hear about his death until three days later. Were you not worried when he didn't return home?

It was normal for him to go away like that whenever he was on special assignments. He could be away for up to three days or even a week before coming home. We would only be communicating on phone. On this particular assignment that took his life, he called me when he got to the community. But we were in the middle of a conversation when his phone line cut off and I became worried; but I felt, maybe his phone battery was down.

Who eventually broke the news of his death to you?

It was my brother-in-law that called on me on Tuesday. He said I should come to the village, that my husband had a little injury. It was when I got to the village that the news was broken to me. They narrated the story of how he died to me. That was how I got to know.

Which state was your husband from?

My husband was from Enugu State but we are based in Onitsha, Anambra State.

What were his last words to you?

That Sunday, he called me and told me he was already at Anaku and Omor communities and that he was on his way to the scene of a crisis and suddenly, he screamed and the conversation dropped. I guess that was the moment he was attacked. After the conversation dropped, I made efforts to call his line but it was not connecting. At that point, I became worried; I even thought he was being kidnapped.

What did you do then?

I was very disturbed because I had never gone to those communities before. I started contemplating whether to find my way to the community to look for my husband or proceed to Awka to make enquiries.

Did you contact any of his superiors in the office?

I did not have their contacts. It was when I was getting ready to go to Awka to make some enquiries that my husband's brother called me and asked after my husband and I told him what happened, adding that I was preparing to go to Awka. Then, he said I should not bother to go to Awka, that I should come to the village to instead to see my husband because he had some injuries.

Has your husband been buried?

Yes, he has been buried; he was buried in June, 2021. The incident happened in March 2021.

How has life been without your husband?

Life is now very miserable, in fact very terrible for me and my children. I have four children and it has been very difficult fending for them and myself. It is not easy for one to lose husband, my hairdressing salon business is not making any headway, there is no equipment and due to where it is located, it does not good enjoy patronage. The money I make can hardly take care of us and right now, there is no fund to get another shop.

My husband's death has been a huge blow as it was unexpected. We were chased out of our rented apartment

as the rent expired. And nobody is asking about us, it is as if we have been left alone, even those who were always coming to visit us when my husband was alive have not bothered to ask us how we are faring. It has been me and my children alone. I am very disturbed, sometimes I feel like committing suicide but whenever such thought comes, I look at my children and the fate that would befall them. Of a truth, life has been so unkind.

Are your children in school?

Only one of them, the eldest, is managing to go to school. The three others have stopped going to school since their father died, as there is no money to cater to their school needs. My business barely takes care of our feeding. Even the one that is going to school, I have not paid the school fees for this term and as things stand now, the school authorities may ask him to stop coming because of the school fees.

What class is he in?

He is in JSS1.

How old are your children?

The first one is 11 years old; the second one is nine years old, the third one is seven years old while the last one is four years old.

What kind of a person was your husband?

My husband was a very truthful and decent man. A lot of people have the perception that Nigeria policemen are not truthful people but it is not so. What I cherish

about my husband will be his truthfulness and honest attitude. He was also disciplined, and did not engage in extramarital affairs, to the best of my knowledge.

He was a very caring man and a loving father to his children. He didn't joke with his family when he was alive. He tried his best for us. He always maintained the right attitude whether in the open or in the secret.

How old was he?

He was 50 years old.

When did he join the police?

He joined the police before we got married in 2009.

Did he tell you what motivated him to join the police?

No. And I did not bother to ask him as long as he found fulfillment in the job he was doing and he never complained about the job.

Did you like the police work he was doing?

What can I do? I met him doing the job already and that was what he was doing to fend for himself and his family.

Where did you meet your husband?

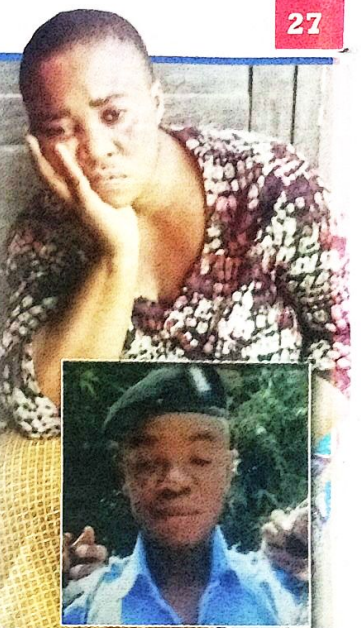
We met in Anambra State and we got married in Enugu.

Have you received any assistance from the police since your husband died?

It was the Anambra State Commissioner of Police that called us when the thing happened, because we were two that were affected. So, he called us to his office in Awka and gave us some money and told us to be managing with it. Apart from that, assistance has not come from anywhere. I am just here as I don't have anyone to speak for me and I continue to ask myself, is this how life is? My husband served his fatherland and died in the process, now, the family he left behind are left unattended to.

What about your husband's parents?

They are dead.



You mean you have not received any form of compensation from the police authorities as a result of your husband's death?

Yes.

What do you want the police authorities or government to do for you?

My husband served the country and sacrificed his life. Now that he is no more, I just want them to come to our rescue. Truly, we need help; I find it difficult to pay house rent, to pay my children's school fees, feed them and do the necessary things. My children cannot go to school at the moment. They should please come to our rescue. If I see money to get a shop at a lucrative location, I think I can manage myself and my children with it. The shop I am presently occupying, the proceeds coming from it cannot even pay its rent, not to talk of catering to our needs. I sometimes take labourer's job at construction sites, but for many months now, I have not been able to go out because I have an injury on my leg.

Mob sets our house ablaze after lynching my husband – Late sergeant's widow



afraid and started thinking of the next line of action, like who to call for help.

How did you eventually discover that he was dead?

It was my mother, who heard about the incident, that called me and asked me how we were doing. I told her we were fine and she said she was coming over to see us.

Was it the police authorities that broke the news to your mother?

No. My mother lives in Anaku and sells wares in a neighbouring community. It was when the information was flying about that my siblings heard about it and informed my mother.

When your mother came, what did she tell you?

The incident happened on Sunday and it was on Monday that I heard about it. When my mother came to our house, she asked about my husband and I narrated what happened to her. She asked if I had called him, I said I had made several calls to my husband's phone and the calls were not connecting. So, my mother broke the news to us.

How old was your husband?

He was 40 years old.

What kind of a person was he?

My husband was the easygoing type. Even though he was a police officer, he never harassed or intimidated anyone. He was a peacemaker and loved making peace. He was also a good family man who cared for his wife and children. He never quarreled with anyone and he was someone that could go to any length to ensure that everyone was peaceful.

Did he tell you the reason he joined the police?

He did not.

Did you like his job as a policeman?

Yes. That was the work he was doing before I met him.

Where did you and your husband meet?

I am from Anambra but I grew up with my parents at Omor, where we met.

When did you get married to your husband?

We got married in 2013.

Do you have children?

Yes, we have three children.

Have you received any form of assistance from anywhere since your husband died?

After the incident happened last year, the Commissioner of Police invited us to his office in Awka. I went with my brothers-in-law. The Divisional Police Officer in Anaku, where my husband worked, took us to meet with the CP. The CP spoke to me and after everything, before we left there, he gave me some money to take care of myself and my children. He said they would get back to us soon.

Have they got back to you as promised?

Up until now, no.

What do you want the police authorities or the government to do for you right now?

Right now, I am very annoyed...and you know why? After they killed my husband, those boys came to our compound and destroyed everything we had; they burnt our tanks, removed our roof and burnt a vehicle that was parked in the compound. They set some part of the building ablaze. I want them apprehended and be made to pay for those things they destroyed and also the death of my husband. It is true that nothing can bring my husband back to life, but the needed assistance or compensation for a man who had served his fatherland should be done so that the family he left behind will not have any regret that their breadwinner served his fatherland. Right now, my children and I are in Nteje, and paying house rent is a big challenge. All my sewing machines and shop items were destroyed when those boys invaded the community and it affected me badly. They destroyed everything we had and made us to start life afresh.

How has life been since your husband's death?

Things have been very hard because my husband was the family's breadwinner. My children and I have just been surviving on the goodwill of my husband's relatives and friends who bring us some foodstuffs. I am a seamstress but you know our work is seasonal, so there has been a lull in business. As a result, I sometimes go to construction sites to work, so as to get money to cater to the needs of my children. I also work on farmlands for people and these are very labourious and stressful jobs.

How old are your children?

The first one is nine years old, the second one is six and the third one will be three by next month. It is challenging running around and leaving them alone at home.