

# Family traumatised over murder of soldier, police begin investigation

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The late Okpe



By Blessing Afolabi

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It was a telephone call of panic for the Okpes on Thursday, October 13 when they received news that their breadwinner, a major and medical doctor, Casmir Okpe, was shot dead by yet-to-be-identified gunmen at Ichi, in the Ekwusigo Local Government Area in Anambra State. The incident happened while on the way home from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi, where he was undergoing residency training.

A brother to the deceased, Mr Hyginus Okpe, told *Sunday PUNCH* that he was surprised to receive a distressing phone call from his brother's wife on Thursday morning in a wailing tone, informing him that his brother was shot and currently in the hospital.

He said that he still had phone conversations regarding some family matters with Okpe on Wednesday preceding the incident.

Hyginus speaking with intense pain said that he was traumatised and couldn't believe his ears, stating that he wondered why anyone would shoot dead an easy-going man.

He added that when he spoke with the late major on Wednesday, he promised to discuss the issue with him after he returned from his duty call at work the next day (Thursday). He further said that it was his brother's phone call he was expecting when his wife called to break the news to him while on her way to the hospital.

Hyginus said, "When she got to the hospital, she was told that he had been taken to the intensive care unit so she wasn't allowed to see him immediately. After some hours, I was still shocked wondering why he was shot when I got a call from my brother's neighbour who told me he wanted to tell me the truth that my brother was already dead. It was like an arrow pierced my chest."

He said in an alarming tone that while they tried to make some findings, it was discovered that some people on a motorcycle trailed him from the hospital when he was returning home.

Hyginus lamented that the 44-year-old Okpe, unaware he was being trailed by gunmen in the dark, slowed down to navigate a bad spot at Ichi where he was shot. He stated that the gunmen took only his phone, leaving his laptop, wallet, and other valuables in the car. He added that doctors from NAUTH came to recover the body with the valuables.

He said sadly, “My brother is the breadwinner of our family and the entire village. Everyone looks up to him because he is a philanthropist. His life was just cut short. He was still with me in Abuja two weeks ago when he came for an induction at the international conference centre.”

He described his brother as an easygoing man who wasn’t problematic and didn’t trespass despite being a major in the army. He noted that the late major was in Maiduguri, Borno State, for over four years for his military training until he left for his hometown to be so brutally murdered.

He explained, “This is so unbearable. He was undergoing residency training at the university teaching hospital as a cardiologist. He was almost rounding off. I guess he was to conclude the programme next year.

“He decided to live as though he wasn’t a military officer hence his reason for renting an apartment outside the barracks and he didn’t wear his uniform parading himself as a military officer. In fact, on the day of the incident, his military identity card was not found on him. He was on mufti and only with his medical ID card. That is how imperturbable he is. No one knew he was a major when his corpse was found.

“My brother’s life was wasted. The whole family and community are in tears. These people caught him and they have finished us. He was returning from night duty and had not rested because he attended to patients till morning. When he left the hospital to retire home to rest, these wicked people wasted his life. His children are still little. He has three children and his first child is barely 10 years old. He doesn’t have issues with anyone. He never spoke to me about having issues with anyone because he was a free-minded person and loved to associate with everyone.

“The testimony from his colleagues showed the extent to which he was a good man. I don’t know what offence he committed to warrant this sort of ill-treatment. I wonder who did this. If it happened on a Monday, we would have thought it was unknown gunmen due to the sit-at-home enforcement.

“He was almost home; the distance between his house and where he was shot wasn’t up to 30 minutes. His family had to be evacuated from where they lived with their property to avoid a repeat of the incident. I can vouch for my brother, he didn’t have issues with anyone.”

He added that the military authorities and the police commissioner were already investigating the matter to unravel the events surrounding Okpe’s murder.

Hyginus stated that he was awaiting a signal from the army headquarters to proceed with the burial arrangements, saying, “Those who killed my brother must be apprehended and prosecuted.”

When our correspondent reached out to the widow of the major, Mrs Clara Okpe, she could barely speak as she was still in shock. She said that she was devastated by the news of her husband's death.

Amid deep breaths and sobs, she said, "I cannot talk right now. The news of the incident is everywhere. You all saw the video on social media. That's all I know. I was only called after the incident.

"I am still waiting to hear more. The person I am mourning, we grew up together. I cannot say anything to anyone now." Asked how she and the kids were faring, she said, "We are there."

### **CMD, security experts comment**

The murder of one of its members and kidnappings in the state forced the Association of Resident Doctors at the NAUTH to withdraw its services for 48 hours from Thursday, October 13 to Friday 14, 2022.

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The association urged the state government and security agencies to urgently bring the perpetrators of the act to justice.

Commenting on the issue, the Chief Medical Director, NAUTH, Nnewi, Dr Joseph Ugboaja, noted that Okpe was a diligent and dedicated worker at the hospital whose work was being appreciably missed.

He added that other staff members in the hospital missed him greatly for his contributions and personality.

He said, "Okpe was a great guy. Very committed and dedicated. We miss him a lot. We sympathise with the family he left behind as we have since his demise being in contact with them. We never had any report that he had an issue with anyone at work or elsewhere."

On his part, a security expert, Colonel Hassan Stan-Labo (retd.), opined that the men who shot the late major appeared to be assassins. He said their aim was to eliminate him since they didn't dispossess him of any valuables but zoomed off immediately they succeeded in shooting him.

He noted that ordinarily, anyone who came across the deceased at the scene of the crime should have in haste, taken him to the hospital for medical attention.

Stan-Labo noted, however, that the average Nigerian would be drawn back due to fear of being delayed by medical practitioners or implicated in the process.

He said that the police needed to carry out investigations on the case to apprehend the killers, adding that though basic technology tools would make the investigation easier.

He said, “In Nigeria, public watchful technology such as closed-circuit television is not easy to come by. Capturing situations such as this will be a bit tough. If there were CCTVs on the street, the police would only have to play back the nearest footage to get the number plate of the Okada (motorcycle) and start tracing from there. This is what is obtainable in developed countries but in Nigeria, it’s difficult for security agents since we haven’t attained that level of technology. One won’t be surprised if the police end up being unable to nab the criminals.”

The security expert said that when one’s duty terminated at night, it was important to stay back until daybreak. He added that those who planned to attack one, would study one’s timing and usually be aware of one’s itinerary and movement.

Stan-Labo advised the public to avoid commuting at odd hours of the day, stating, “Criminals cannot select routes, they only follow and trail that of their victims. If your work terminates at 5am or 6am, why not wait till 6:30am or 7am before stepping out? If you resume work at 11pm, it’s best you get to work at 8pm. You shouldn’t be on the road once it is past 8pm or before 6:30am.”

He further said that Nigeria was no longer safe since one’s safety lay in one’s hands, adding that one must be careful of entertaining guests at odd hours because no one could be trusted.

He stated, “That person one trusts the most is the tool the killers use to bring one down. Every door of your house should be properly locked while the main entrance should have a peephole for easy identification of those who want to come in. Your personal security is your responsibility owing to the kind of government we have in power. We live in a country where the government doesn’t bother about the welfare of citizens so you have to take your personal security seriously. If we keep having this governing system in Nigeria, then we are finished. It’s better to protect oneself, no one cares about one.”

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He advised those travelling with kids to be more cautious by ensuring to carry the needed items for the journey to avoid stopping on the road.

Also, a security expert and safety consultant, Festus Okoloda, noted that the police should undertake a backward investigation to ascertain the source of the assassination. He also urged the checking of some decisions made that some people were not comfortable with which could necessitate the act.

He added that it was likely that Okpe had been trailed before he was unfortunately met at the bad spot by his killers.

He said, “Generally, individuals are advised to avoid late-night trips in areas that are not well secured. Don’t move late. If you must then you should do so in secure places with functional street lights or alongside security escorts for your safety. If Nigeria was properly developed, security cameras should have been on the road to help in fact-findings

during investigations. This would have gone a long way to help nab the criminals. Nigeria is not there yet, we are still developing.”

## Police react

Contacted for comments on the issue, the Anambra State police spokesperson, Tochukwu Ikenga, confirmed the incident, saying that an investigation into the incident had since commenced into the matter.

He noted, “The command wants to use this opportunity to reiterate the call to the witnesses of this unfortunate incident to come forward to provide information that will facilitate the ongoing investigation. Meanwhile, the vehicle has been recovered and further details shall be communicated please.”