

Printer's error reignites anguish of Anambra six family members killed by food poisoning

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Last year October, a family of six in Amakwa, a community in the Ozubulu town of Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State, died of food poisoning. **IKENNA OBIANERI**, who visited the community ahead of the burial slated for November 29, 2022, reports that one year after, the community has not got over the tragedy

Death is an inevitable end but the one that wiped away a family of six in Amakwa, a community in Ozubulu town, Ekwusigo Local Government Area of Anambra State, is not the type one should wish for even one's enemy.

When the news of the death of Mr Augustine Nwokedi, his wife, Josephine, and their four children surfaced in the media space last week, it was greeted with shock and sadness.

Unknown to many, however, the incident happened October 8, 2021 rather than October 8, 2022, as erroneously portrayed by the obituary poster of the family of six, which circulated widely on the social media.

The poster, which has the photographs of the six deceased, was headlined: "Painful Exit of One Family."

It read: "The entire family of the late Chief Joseph A. Nwokedi (Ezennadike) of (Umuifeduba) in Umuomukwe Amakwa Ozubulu Ekwusigo LGA of Anambra State, regret to announce the passing away of our beloved brother, wife, sons and daughter, whose death occurred on October 8, 2022, after taking their dinner."

This 'unconscious' error in date, therefore, brought painful freshness to the tragedy.

Amakwa community is a remote village in Ozubulu, located several miles away from the headquarters of its local government area, Ekwusigo.

Our correspondent, who went in search of the community last week, discovered that the death of the Nwokedis has sadly become an identification mark for the community.

"Oh! That community where a whole family was wiped off," is the response a first-timer visiting will get from transporters and residents of neighbouring communities at the mention of "Amakwa".

Notwithstanding that the tragic deaths occurred over a year ago, the memories are still fresh with the people of the area.

Our correspondent was told that the family members died on the morning of October 8, 2021, after having a dinner of corn meal the night before.

An autopsy ordered by the police, according to head of the family, confirmed food poisoning as the cause of death.

However, the community is still puzzled as to the source of the corn meal. The people are also asking: Who could have poisoned the easygoing family?

The deceased man was a commercial motorcycle operator and was before his death, aged 41. His wife, 39, was a seamstress. Their four children — three boys and a girl — were between the ages of three and 12.

They were described a peace-loving family.

An elder in the village said a curse had been laid on whoever poisoned the family, because such was an abomination in the community.

When our correspondent visited the community and the home of the deceased, he met the head of the Nwokedi family, who identified himself as Ikebude Nwokedi.

The family head narrated to Saturday PUNCH, the details of the circumstances surrounding the death of the family of six.

According to Ikebude, the deceased had corn meal as their dinner and went to bed on the said night, but unfortunately, they came out in the morning and started vomiting and they were all rushed to the hospital.

The elder explained that while in the hospital, three of the children died first, then followed by the remaining child and then the father and the mother followed thereafter.

Ikebude debunked the earlier report that the victims died at home and that their bodies were discovered after community members broke down the door of their house.

The family head said the case was reported to the police and it was subsequently transferred to the Homicide Section at the State Criminal Investigations Department in Awka, for investigation.

He said the SCID conducted an autopsy and reported that the family died of food poisoning from the corn meal they had the previous night.

“The source of the corn meal and the reason for the ‘food poisoning’ still remains a mystery to both the family members and the community,” Ikebude said.

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The family head said efforts were made by family members to get information from the victims before they gave up the ghost “but they were too unconscious to even muster a word and unfortunately, they passed on few days after.”

He lamented that the family members spent over N3m both on the treatment of the deceased and the autopsy conducted on their bodies.

He also blamed the hospital for not acting promptly when the deceased were initially brought to their facility.

Ikebule, who spoke in Igbo language, said, “I am the senior brother of the deceased and the head of the family. My brother lost his life and that of his wife and all children mysteriously on October 8, 2021 and not 2022.

“It was the printer who designed the burial poster of the deceased that made an error by putting 2022 on the poster instead of 2021, thereby making it look as if it was a fresh incident.

“Although, the children have long been buried, we are making preparations for the burial of my late brother and his wife.

“On the night before their death, they ate ‘ini okan’ (corn meal). The mystery of it is that till date, nobody knows the source of the meal, where they bought it or if it was from the preparation of the meal, everything still remains a mystery to us. And it is so unfortunate that

the whole thing had to happen that way.

“My late brother and his wife were easygoing people, who never made trouble with anybody. So, we don’t know who might have poisoned them or if it was from the way they prepared the meal. Only God knows how it happened.

“The case was reported to the police and transferred to the Homicide Section, State CID, Awka. They requested an autopsy to be conducted on the corpses to ascertain the cause of death.

“A team of pathologists were contacted from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, where an autopsy/toxicology test was conducted on the corpse of one of the deceased persons and the result sent to the state CID, Awka.

“We got the photocopies of the result and a team of professionals were able to break down the medical terminologies and explain the cause of the death of my brother and his family to us.

“The incident was investigated but no arrest was made as no one knows the source of the meal they ate that night, where it was bought from or how it was got.”

While speaking further from a corner of the deceased’s compound, which truly appeared deserted, Ikebude added that the deceased would have been buried long ago, but the burial was delayed by the formalities of going to announce the death of his late brother’s wife to her family members in Umuahia.

According to him, the family of the wife received the news of their daughter’s death badly.

“My late brother’s wife was from Umuahia in Abia State. When the shocking news got to them, they did not take it lightly with us; her community members threatened that we must provide their daughter alive. It took a lot of visitations and dialogue between our community and their community before frayed nerves were finally calmed and they allowed us to fix their burial date. The funeral programme will commence on November 29, 2022.”

A younger brother of the deceased, who craved anonymity, lamented that the family members had gone through a lot since the period of the sad incident and he would not want it to continue. He blamed the printer’s error for reawakening the pains of the sad incident.

“We have gone through a lot since this incident happened and we would not want it to continue. It is an unfortunate incident, which the family members and the community are trying to push behind us. If not for the printer’s error, we wanted to just give them a quiet burial without any noise,” he added.

Also, a community leader, who identified herself as Mrs Nkechi Okeke, described the incident as embarrassing and a taboo to the community, adding that the issue of food poisoning is a “great sacrilege” in the community.

Okeke said the Ozubulu elders had, through their gods, laid a “curse” on the culprits.

“The incident happened in 2021. It was a sad period for the community as we woke up on October 8, to start beholding the corpses of the deceased family members. Their death has remained an unforgettable mystery to the community, therefore, a curse was placed on whoever committed such a dastardly act.

“The family were an easygoing people who never wanted any trouble. We don’t know why such would happen to them. Although, it is only God that really knows what really happened, we believe if the hand of any man was in their death, that person will surely be exposed one day.

“It was the first time such a thing would happen in our community and we are not taking it lightly. The incident is still a shock to us; it is a taboo in our community for anyone to kill somebody through food poisoning and the community has placed curses on anyone who did such dastardly act and the decision was taken to avoid a recurrence of such an evil act.

“Right now, our president-general travelled and the community does not have a monarch yet, we are still going to meet to take a final position on the matter,” Okeke added.

When contacted, the state police spokesman, Tochukwu Ikenga, said he was not aware of the incident, as it happened before his transfer to Anambra State.