

*Police frustrating justice after lady beat my nine-year-old daughter to death – Benue man

Godfrey George

Thirty-seven-year-old Rivers State artiste, James Korshima-Achiriki, is inconsolable.

Amid hot tears and painful silence, he narrated how his daughter's life was cut short at nine by a family friend in Enugu State, where she lived and worked as a maid.

"It feels like my heart has been ripped out of my body. I feel very empty. Precious just clocked nine a few months ago. She was too smart for her age. She didn't deserve to die," Korshima-Achiriki said amid sobs.

He swore only justice would assuage the hurt of losing his daughter, who dreamt of becoming a medical doctor.

According to him, the child was beaten to death for sleeping while her boss, identified only as Ujunwa, was busy feeding her child.

The Benue man said he met Ujunwa through a family friend, Mrs Mary Okoroafor, based in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, in March 2022.

Because of how close he got with Okoroafor, he said he didn't hesitate to give her one of his nieces as a maid.

"I have five biological children with my wife but not all of them stay with me here in Port Harcourt. Three of my kids live here with me, while the other two are with a relative, but I am the one taking care of them.

"I also had other children from other family members staying with me to make ends meet. I have more than six children here with me. It is from the kids here that I gave one 6½-year-old niece, aged 13, to live with Okoroafor as a maid," he stated.

A costly mistake

He recalled that after a few months of the teenager living with Okoroafor, the latter returned to say one of her friends, who lived on New Haven Estate, Enugu, needed a young girl who would 'stay with her and play with her newborn'.

Further enquiries by the Benue indigene revealed that the said woman's husband lived in the United States.

"I decided to give my biological daughter, Precious, to Ujunwa. Mary connected Ujunwa to me and we discussed it over the phone.

Ujunwa, who said she was from Ebonyi State, told me that she lived in Enugu State and that her husband lived abroad. She said she just wanted a young girl who would live with her and play with her newborn baby, who was four months old at that time.

Ujunwa promised to see her through school and help her out with other things. So, I decided to send my nine-year-old daughter to her. This was around March 2022.

"I didn't meet Ujunwa physically for one day. After we spoke and I was convinced, I put her on a bus from Port Harcourt and sent her to Ujunwa in Enugu State.

"Ujunwa discussed with the driver and they finalised how they were going to pick her up and take her home," he stated.

He noted that he never suspected any maltreatment from Ujunwa for the five months Precious lived with her before the unfortunate incident that led to her death.

Korshima-Achiriki also said he never failed to call his daughter on video every day to be sure she was fine even though he never visited the house for one day till the girl's passing.

"Whenever I called her, she would dance for me and we would chat. I would ask her if she was being treated fine and she would say yes. I didn't notice any issue at all, not even one complaint at all," he added.

Alleged kidnap

On November 10, he received a 'strange' phone call, informing him that Ujunwa and his daughter Precious, had been abducted by gunmen, and a ransom of N20m was to be paid.

He noted that just a day before the phone call, he called his daughter to inform her that her mum – his wife – had just given birth to a baby boy.

He added, "She was really happy and she said she would love to visit the baby. The next day, I got a call from some kidnappers, saying they had my daughter and her guardian. It was not clear to me at all.

"They called me through Ujunwa's number. I told them to give the phone to Ujunwa and they did. Once she got the phone from them, she started crying that she didn't know where she was for over 48 hours now. Before I could continue and ask her any questions, the phone was taken away from her.

The kidnappers said they needed a ransom of N20m or else they would kill the two of them. I begged them to hold on for me to reach Ujunwa's husband so the negotiations could begin because, with me, I won't be able to negotiate with them. They agreed and hung up."

He said he immediately called Ujunwa's family members to inform them of the situation, adding that the husband began to suspect him of arranging the kidnap.

"I explained to him to, please, call his wife's line to speak to the kidnappers as I was not even in Enugu and that my daughter, who lived with his wife, was also a victim.

"He told me that he called for days before he could get them. He agreed to pay the ransom. They gave him till November 15



The late Precious



Suspect



Korshima-Achiriki

"Ujunwa's husband also called me, telling me to make sure I follow up with the case. I was confused. The man said he was suspecting his wife of staging the kidnap and ransom collection," he noted.

At the station, Korshima-Achiriki spoke to the Divisional Police Officer, demanding to know the whereabouts of his daughter but, according to him, Ujunwa stressed that his daughter had been killed by the kidnappers, insisting that she saw the corpse.

"When I looked at the appearance of this lady, she doesn't look like someone that was kidnapped at all. She even had her gold necklace and rings on her finger at the police station. Even she couldn't convince herself that she was abducted," he stressed.

After a few days of investigation, he said the New Haven DPO transferred the case to the anti-kidnapping department of the police and Ujunwa was moved to the squad on November 16.

He wrote a statement there and a new Investigating Police Officer was assigned to the case.

"Every day, they would bring Ujunwa out and take her in after a short chat. I visited the station countless times but met no results. The police are frustrating my efforts," he added.

Justice for sale

With no headway from the police, Korshima-Achiriki said he got a lawyer and wrote a petition to the state police commissioner on November 26 to move the case to the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department because, according to him, he was no longer comfortable with the way the matter was being handled at the anti-kidnapping department.

Reaching the SCIID, he said an officer in charge told him to pay the sum of N200,000 for "signal and effecting arrest."

Ujunwa was still in police custody while all this was going on and her husband also returned from the United States to take custody of the newborn. He told me he was in full support of getting justice for my child. I couldn't come up with the money despite begging a lot of people so I could pay up the money," he added.

Truth revealed

While in this dilemma, he noted that Ujunwa requested to see him at the station, saying that she was ready to tell him the truth of what transpired between her and his daughter.

Speaking further, he said, "She (Ujunwa) asked that I took my phone away so I don't record whatever she was saying. I accepted. She told me that she beat my daughter to death and that there was never any kidnap. The whole kidnap story was false. She told me that with her own mouth outside the cell.

"When I asked her where the corpse was, she said she dropped the corpse by the roadside in Ituku/Ozalla community, Enugu State.

"She couldn't give me a specific reason. She simply said when she was feeding her daughter, my daughter was in the bedroom sleeping. She then told my daughter to stand up and help her out, but the young girl was obviously sleeping.

"She said she got angry and beat her and she 'mistakenly'

died. I asked her if she had explained this to the police and she said yes. She also said she told the IPO of the case this story but he encouraged her to tell me."

He said the IPO told him that he took some men to the location to retrieve the girl's corpse but found out that some youths, on the orders of a community chief, burnt the corpse because it was decomposing.

Weeks later, the said chief was invited to the station but Korshima-Achiriki claimed that he was not allowed to speak to him.

He said when he met the DPO to ask for an update on the matter, he warned him to stop demanding his daughter's corpse.

Fight for justice

The bereaved father said he involved the human rights office of the police in the matter but to his surprise, the unit head said the IPO told him that 'the two parties were resolving the dispute'.

"My child was killed and he is saying it was a dispute? I haven't even seen her corpse. What kind of settlement was he talking about? I want to see my daughter's corpse. I want justice for my daughter," he cried.

He said he visited the community where his daughter was said to have been burnt but found no traces.

"I am calling on the President, Muhammadu Buhari, and his dear wife, Aisha; the Ministry of Women Affairs, the governors of Ebonyi and Enugu states, the Inspector-General of Police and the commissioners of police in the two states to come to my aid. I have nobody.

"I am hopeless right now. My wife got angry and carried the other children and went back to Benue. This is devastating for my family and my career. This matter should not be swept under the carpet. My daughter, Precious, needs justice.

"I know I failed my daughter. I failed her. Now, she is dead, and I blame myself for it. I should have been more careful. I need her remains so I can bury her and fight for her," he added.

Case charged to court – Enugu PPRO

The Public Relations Officer of the Enugu State Police Command, Daniel Ndukwe, told our correspondent that the police had done their best for the family and charged the case to court.

He said the police uncovered the lie being peddled by Ujunwa and found out that the lady beat the girl to death out of anger.

"The police are not doing anything out of the ordinary and we cannot sweep the case under the carpet. We have even charged the case to court and the lady in question is still in our custody till the court decides otherwise. The case will be heard in a few days, I reliably learnt.

"Mr Korshima is accusing us wrongly. We have fought for him in this matter and deserve kudos, not condemnation," he said.

Speaking further, Ndukwe said, "The Homicide Section of the SCIID concluded an investigation into the case of the alleged murder of a nine-year-old Precious James Korshima by her guardian, Ujunwa Ugwuoke, 29, who was arraigned in the Enugu North Magistrates' Court on January 19, 2023.

"The suspect was remanded in a custodial centre and the case file transmitted to the Office of the Attorney General of Enugu State for perusal and legal advice through the Director of Public Prosecutions on the orders of the magistrate.

"The investigation conducted into the case revealed that the suspect confessed to having, during the night of November 8, 2022, beaten and caused the death of the minor, who was her home help, in her residence at Fidelity Estate, Okpara Avenue, Enugu.

"Thereafter, in the morning hours of the following day, she took the lifeless body of the child to the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku-Ozalla, for medical attention.

"However, upon getting confirmation of her death by doctors on duty, she immediately dumped her corpse in a refuse dump along Ugo-Nwagidi Village Road, Enugwueze Unu-Ituku community in Awgu Local Government Area."

Lawyer, child rights advocate speak

A Rivers State-based lawyer, Mrs Selena Onuoha, urged parents to be mindful of the people they give their kids to.

She advised the young father to follow up the case to the end.

"It is a crime to give a child not up to 18 to another to work as a house help. It is against the Child Rights Act (2003), which Nigeria is a signatory to.

"It is cruel for any person to cause bodily harm to any child and this woman in question, who is also a mother, should go in for it if found guilty by the court," she added.

A child rights expert, Mercy Chepaka, told Saturday PUNCH that she was shocked that a woman in 21st-century Nigeria would beat a child to the point of death.

She said, "How can a human being beat a child to death? It is the height of wickedness. The woman doesn't deserve to see the outside world till she is properly dealt with by the law.

"I am glad the father took the matter to the police and to court. I urge the parties to make sure justice is served and the young girl is granted justice even in her grave."