

interview



I'm shocked flood swept my husband away despite his hefty stature – Wife

Zainab Yusuf, a mother of two tells EMMANUEL OJO how her husband, Najim Yusuf, a 45-year-old truck driver and businessman, was swept away by flood in the Alakuko area of Lagos State on May 14, 2023 and has since been missing

Where was your husband going on the day of the incident?

He is a truck driver and he sells iron rods. That's what he does for a living. He uses the truck to transport goods for his clients and travels to many places.

Can you recall how your husband fell?

It was an accident. He fell into a gutter and was swept away. He knew that there was a gutter there but he thought there was a good slab on it, so, when he put his leg on it (the slab), it broke and he fell into the flooded gutter.

Did you witness the incident?

I wasn't at the scene where it happened. Those who witnessed it told me. According to what I was told and how it was explained to me by those who witnessed it, he parked his vehicle in front of a filling station to get some water in a keg at the filling station to fix his vehicle. You know what many filling stations do at their entrance, how they make an iron slab to cover the gutter for people to cross to the other side and access the station. But the iron slab didn't cover the gutter well; a piece of wood was used to support it. However, my husband did not know that the wood and iron slab were not properly joined. So, there was space in between. As soon as he placed his foot on the edge of the wood, not knowing that it wasn't firm, it gave way and he fell into the gutter, which is a very deep one and it is very close to a canal. That was how it played out.

Was it raining at the time?

Yes, it was raining at the time. It was raining heavily that Sunday. After raining during the day, there was also a downpour on the night of the same day. The flood carried him away. The gutter is linked to a canal where the water flowed.

When exactly did it happen?

It took place on Sunday, May 14, 2023.

Were there efforts made to rescue him?

They made some efforts. We looked for him but couldn't find him. When some of his friends got to know about what happened, they went there immediately and searched through the gutters up to the canal that was there, they tried to find his location with the way the water was flowing. They looked for him the first day, the second day and up to Thursday from Sunday (May 14) when it happened but couldn't find him.

Was there no intervention from eyewitnesses or other people around to save him before his friends arrived?

They said that the flow of the water was heavy and my husband happened to be a very big person in stature. He is tall and big. According to the man that was in the vehicle with him, it was when my husband shouted as he fell that alerted him. He said he jumped out of the vehicle and tried to save him but couldn't.

He said he ran forward to see if he could catch up with my husband but when he got to the other side of the gutter, he discovered that he (my husband) hadn't surfaced there yet. He said that when he ran back, the people there said the water kept pulling him and that no one could jump in to rescue him. So, that was how he was swept away by the water.

Was the incident reported to any government agency for assistance?

We reported it to the police. The police are aware of it. It was on the Thursday of that week that we took his car out of the police station. There is a police station close to the filling station where the incident occurred.

Can you describe the area where the incident took place?

It happened in Alakuko, around the Agbado area, toward Tollgate in Sango. It was on the second day that I got to know about what happened. When it happened, some of his friends

explain what happened to me.

What else had been done after the police report?

Well, nothing has been done. It wasn't a case of murder, so there is nothing the police can do about that. We can only keep searching for him. That's all we can do. We felt that his body should have floated on water after three days as it is the norm with drowning but we haven't seen anything.

Apart from reporting to the police, did you make any effort to report to other government agencies that could be of help?

We didn't do that. My sister only went to a radio station to report that and that was on the third day after the incident. I think the radio station only announced it and that was it.

What are your thoughts at the moment? Are you still very hopeful that he will be found dead or alive?

Well, if I knew how to go about finding him or if I had the money to make that happen, I would have done it. If I see people that can help me find him, I will find him dead or alive. If I get help from any quarter on how my husband's body can be found, I will be glad. You know everything or all of these things have to do with money but what was very surprising to me was how water could carry a person and they would not be found after searching for them.

It's also possible that the water took him to a place different from where we have been looking for him. But if he has been dead since then, at least, someone should have seen his body and reached out. He is tall and very dark in complexion. He is also on the big side; he is huge. I don't really know how to measure or estimate his height but he is quite tall and big.

How old was he on his last birthday?

He turned 45 about two months ago.

How many children do you have?

Two children.

How have you been coping since then?

My family and friends have been there and have been helpful to me.

What about his parents? Are they still alive?

His dad is deceased but his mum is still alive. He has other family members too - brothers and sisters. His siblings are still investigating the matter and are on the lookout for their brother. Some have said that he is not dead but is somewhere, maybe he's held captive somewhere or someone had rescued him somewhere or something like that but the kind of captivity that he is in as they suggested, we don't know but that is what they have suggested. I don't know whether they knew that spiritually or something but if it's spiritual, I feel that they should be able to explain further. They also came to my house to get the serial number of his phone from the pack, maybe they could track his phone but his number is actually not going through. They said they could track the location of the phone but they haven't given me any response.

Has his mum been informed of his death?

She has been informed but she is old.

What was her reaction when she heard?

All I was told was that she has been informed. We haven't communicated since then.

Have you broken the news to your children?

Yes, they are aware but they are still expecting their dad and we are still looking for him and haven't seen him.

How old are they?

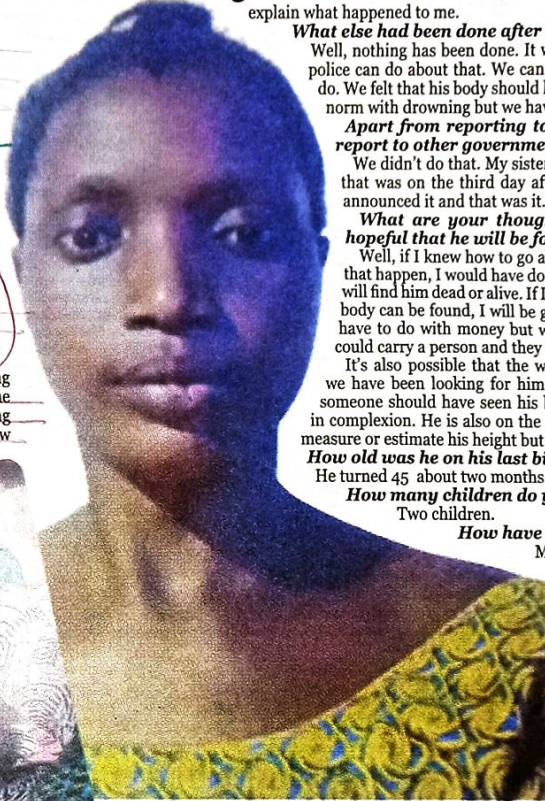
My first child will soon be 11 and the second one will soon be nine.

What did you tell them?

They are aware that their dad fell into a gutter. They are aware of everything, that we are still looking for him.

Did you struggle to tell?

No, I didn't struggle to tell them. They knew just the way I knew about it. The children were aware that we were looking for him on the day of the incident and had been trying to reach him on his mobile number and it wasn't going through. So, when I was informed that his vehicle was at the station, I told the children too, and before they went to school the next day, I told them that I was going to the station to check whether their dad was there. They fell sick at the same time. They just completed the full dosage of their medication not long ago. I really miss him. My mum has been around and has helped me a lot. I feel bad and feel sad. I find it difficult to sleep too and I know it's the situation at hand that has made it so.



came to the house and said his vehicle was at the police station, and that they didn't know what happened. I initially thought it was the (police) station in Ajuwon (in the Alagbole area of Ogun State), close to me but they said that it was the (police) station in Alakuko and it was already late. So, I said I would go to the station on Monday morning. That Monday morning, my neighbour accompanied me as we headed for the station. On our way there, when we got to the place where my husband and his friends usually stayed to work, we met his friends there and his friends told me not to worry, that they would have the issue sorted out, and that I should just go home.

I asked them if there was something else involved that they didn't want me to know but they said no, that there was nothing. They said his vehicle was in the station and he was also there at the station. They told me to go back home, so I left them and went on to board a vehicle going to the (police) station. I told my neighbour to come along and he did. When we got to the (police) station, they said we would have to see the divisional police officer. We waited to see the DPO and that was where my in-laws met me.

When it was time to see the DPO, they refused to let me come along with them to see the DPO.

It was the man that was with my husband when the incident occurred that reported it to the police, but the police detained him, saying that he would be released when the family of the victim was seen. So, he was the one my in-laws and husband's friends went to make all the necessary arrangements for his release. That was after my husband's elder brother had heard the narration of how it happened from him (as the eyewitness).

What went through your mind at that time?

They tried telling me some things in an attempt to deceive me to leave the (police) station but I insisted that I wanted to see my husband, because I saw his vehicle there (at the police station). But they told me that we could not talk to him (my husband) till the following day. They used that to deceive me, to take me home before they broke the news to me. On getting me to the house, they broke the news about what happened and that was how I got to know about the issue on Monday evening, that was a day after the incident.

It was a sad news. They didn't tell me that he fell into a ditch, they only told me that he died, it was later they narrated how it happened to me. It was shocking to me. They narrated it to me when I started requesting that I wanted to see his remains, then, they had no other option than to

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