

Celine, Afiba families fear foul play in Aba hook-up saga

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| By Godfrey George

GODFREY GEORGE writes on how two ladies, Celine Ndudim, and Afiba Tandoh, disappeared after allegedly visiting a friend they met online

In a chilling tale of mystery and tragedy, two ladies have gone missing after visiting a man they met on Facebook.

The missing ladies, Celine Ndudim from Nigeria and Afiba Tandoh from Ghana embarked on their ill-fated journey on April 27, travelling from Port Harcourt to Aba, Abia State's commercial hub.

Their destination was the residence of one Andrew Ochekwu (Amechi), a man based in the Ogbor Hill area of Aba.

Ochekwu, now late, had been seen in a viral video clip on social media inviting the two women to his home for a "hook-up," a slang term in Nigeria often associated with transactional sex.

Human rights activist, Harrison Gwamnishu, brought this alarming situation to light through a series of Facebook posts.

He disclosed that Ochekwu had allegedly held Ndudim and Tandoh hostage after their arrival.

In May, Gwamnishu announced that the ladies had gone missing, and Ochekwu was subsequently arrested by the Aba Police Divisional Headquarters for being in possession of 'women's belongings'.

Despite the evidence suggesting the women had visited him, Ochekwo reportedly refused to confess to any wrongdoing.

Gwamnishu shared that numerous other women came forward with testimonies, claiming that Ochekwo had previously kidnapped and attempted to murder them before they managed to escape.

The severity of the case led to its transfer from Aba to the Anti-Kidnapping Unit of the Abia State Police Command in Umuahia, and eventually to the Force Headquarters in Abuja.

This move came after an unidentified individual petitioned the Inspector-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, alleging that Ochekwo was living in relative comfort while in custody.

The situation took a grim turn when Gwamnishu revealed in another post that Ochekwo had been killed while being transported by policemen from Abia to Abuja.

“Before I left Delta with the victims’ families to Abuja, I got a call that Andrew Ochekwo, the man who kidnapped the two friends, was killed.

“They (police) said while they were taking him (the suspect) to Abuja, the man tried to escape and he was shot dead,” Gwamnishu explained in a video uploaded on Facebook.

Further confirming the death, Gwamnishu uploaded another video showing a body, identified by staff members of his human rights group, Behind Bars Initiative, as Ochekwo’s.

The group had travelled to Otukpo, Benue State, where the body had been deposited in a morgue, to verify the death.

Adding to the horror, Gwamnishu and the Intelligence Response Team of the police from the Force Intelligence Bureau discovered a decomposed body in a bush near Ochekwo’s Aba residence.

“Yesterday (Monday), at about 10:00 p.m., we arrived in Aba and the company of police officers from FIB-IRT Abuja, we went out for a search and discovered a decomposed body wrapped and dumped somewhere around ZeeRock Area Ogbor-Hill, Aba, Abia State,” Gwamnishu wrote.

He also noted that the body was missing several parts, including the head, two hands, and two legs, making identification challenging.

A curtain used to wrap the body matched one seen in Ochekwo’s residence, hinting at a possible connection to the missing women.

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However, the identity of the discovered body remains unconfirmed.

Families beg for justice

The families of Celine Ndudim and Afiba Tandor, the ladies who had gone missing after visiting a male friend they met on Facebook, are crying for justice.

Celine’s sister, Tessy Ndudim, told BBC News Pidgin the girls were declared missing on April 27, 2024.

She said she had also reported to the Abia State Police Command who had begun investigating the matter before it was taken over by the Force Headquarters.

This is coming after police authorities said they had recovered one dead body near the place the girls were believed to have lodged before their phones went off.

How it happened

Tessy said she got a call from her sister on April 27, who told her that the man she and her friend had gone to visit from Port Harcourt to Aba had kidnapped them.

That same day, Tessy said she travelled to Aba and reported the matter to the police.

She confirmed that indeed her sister, Celine and her friend, Afiba, had gone to see one man, Andrew Amechi, in Aba. After a few hours, Celine was said to have sent a WhatsApp message to one of her friends that she had been kidnapped and asked her to call the police and cry for help.

Celine said she shared this information with the police when she got to the Abia State Police Command.

“The police would have rescued my sister and her friend that week when I reported the matter to them, but they did not seem to take it seriously. They kept saying it was a gradual process and that wherever they were, they could not be injured.

“But I insisted, and they finally went for a search in the area believed to be their last location. But, when they got there, they couldn’t access all the houses.

“I saw a car believed to belong to the suspect because my sister had shared a video of the car when it came to pick them up at a hotel when they arrived in Aba.

“The police dismissed me and said they would go for another search by 2 am the next morning. When they got there, they said they didn’t see anything,” she said.

Tessy said the response from the police made them write a petition to the Police Zone 9 in Umuahia.

An order was given by the Umuahia Command and some men were deployed to go for another search in that same location where the girls were believed to have been.

“It was the Umuahia Command that finally made an arrest in the same building I had told the first set of officers to check,” she added.

Tessy said her family had been distraught since the news broke, adding that her mother had been sick since then.

She begged the Abia State Government to lend their voice in the matter as many people had reported similar cases in the area.

Missing Ghanaian citizen married

Afiba Tandor, the second lady who is missing is a citizen of Ghana, who visited Celine and joined her on this ill-fated trip to see Amechi.

Afiba’s husband told BBC News Pidgin that he was not happy with the way the police were handling the matter.

He said the issue had lingered for more than one month and no headway had been made.

He said he spoke to his wife when she left Accra, Ghana with Celine for Lagos. From Lagos, they went to Owerri, Imo State, before they travelled to Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

The husband also said he was aware that his wife, Afiba, accompanied her friend to Aba to see Amechi.

His worry became fear when he could no longer reach his wife, as she was not responding to his text messages.

The next day, he said he got a text message from a friend of Celine that Afiba had been kidnapped alongside Celine.

The man said he reached out to Celine's family members who reported the matter to the police in Aba and followed up with all the things the police said they needed.

He said he did not believe that the body the police were said to have recovered was his wife's until a DNA test was done.

"I am not happy and I don't believe that my wife is dead. If I knew my wife was dead, would I be talking to you like this?"

"I beg the Nigerian Police to do everything possible to rescue my wife and her friend," he added.

Ghana High Commission involved

Our correspondent learnt that the Ghanaian High Commission had been involved in the matter.

A representative of the commission who spoke to *Saturday PUNCH* but refused to give their name because an official statement was being prepared on the matter said the entire commission was sad over the incident.

"Irrespective of whatever the case is, those ladies did not deserve this gruesomeness. Afiba is married and she has a family. She deserves to be treated with dignity.

"I cannot say much on the matter because of its sensitivity and also because an official report is still being prepared on the matter. It is sad," the source said.

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Afiba's husband confirmed to BBC News Pidgin that he reported the matter to the Ghana High Commission and the Nigerian Embassy, urging them to ensure his wife is rescued alive and safe.

Suspect shot

On Friday, May 31, 2024, news broke that the prime suspect, Andrew Amechi, who was being transferred from Aba to Abuja was dead.

According to several reports and video evidence which are now online on X and other social media platforms, made public by Gwamnishu, the suspect was said to have died during an open fire with vigilantes.

The men who shot the suspect was said to have been arrested by the police and put in custody.

Afiba's husband, reacting to this, told BBC Pidgin that he did not believe the suspect was dead.

He said, "I no believe am at all say Andrew Amechi don die until police show me im deadibodi and dem put hand for im neck and show me ogbonge proof say e don die, I no believe am!"

“Andrew Amechi na sociopath wey di British Police also don declare wanted so no be pesin wey police go handle like small pikin. Make dem find way rescue my wife and ensure say justice dey served for dia mata.”

Decomposing body not Celine’s – Sister

Tessy Ndudim, Celine’s sister, said the decomposing body found close to the home of the suspect did not belong to her sister.

She said the fact that the body was decomposing showed that the person had died long before Celine and Afiba’s visit to the area.

In a video posted on Gwanishu’s Facebook page, some policemen headed by DCP Sanusi Mohammed of the FIB-IRT, Abuja, and a few human rights activists went for a search in the area and recovered a dead body wrapped in a curtain.

The body was said to be decapitated and missing some vital body parts.

Police said it was going to subject the body to DNA testing to confirm.

Police reaction

When contacted, the police spokesperson in Abia State, Maureen Chinaka, confirmed the development, but could not give much detail.

Mrs Chinaka, an assistant superintendent of police, however, said she would not comment on the matter because the case has since been transferred to the Force Headquarters in Abuja.

“We made an arrest on the case and we transferred it on the 21 of April to IRT of the force headquarters,” she said.

The Force spokesperson, Muiyiwa Adejobi, did not respond to calls and a text message seeking his comments when *Saturday PUNCH* reached out to him on Friday.

On Wednesday, however, on X, Adejobi wrote, “The police will address the media on this matter ASAP when the IGP receives a comprehensive report. Many of them are just speculating.”

Public outcry

This harrowing story has gripped the Nigerian public, sparking widespread outrage and concern.

The tragic disappearance of Ndudim and Tandoh, coupled with Ocheikwo’s suspicious death in custody, has raised serious questions about the safety of online interactions, the efficiency of law enforcement, and the protection of human rights in Nigeria.

As the investigation continues, many are calling for more stringent measures to prevent such incidents in the future. The need for improved police accountability, better investigative procedures, and enhanced public awareness about the dangers of meeting strangers on the Internet is more pressing than ever.

This incident is a stark reminder of the vulnerabilities that exist in our society and the urgent need to address them to ensure the safety and security of all citizens.

The families of Celine Ndudim and Afiba Tandoh, along with the entire nation, await justice and closure in this deeply unsettling case.

A Delta State-based lawyer, Mr Favour Ajuebor, said the police had a lot of questions to answer as to how a suspect in their care was shot on his way to Abuja from Abia.

He, responding via a Facebook post on his official page on Thursday, wrote, “How come he’s the only casualty in that outbreak? How come there is no report of any police officer who was attacked? How come he’s the only one who died in that vehicle?”

“How did the attackers get the information on the route they were using? Something is been covered that should be uncovered.

Another Facebook user, Kenneth Efeh, wrote, “The police have been compromised. I don’t trust them. Andrew’s killing was a calculated move to conceal the heinous crimes committed by the syndicate. They know what they are doing.

“My only concern is the two ladies that are yet to be found. Now that Andrew is no more, the situation has become complicated.”

Another user, Fidelis Ozuawala, wrote, “It’s simple! Get the banks/Central Bank of Nigeria to fish out the various recent transactions that Andrew made, and get the receivers to say what such transactions were for.

“With that, we can know who Andrew is working with, for and for what he paid those monies for. Simple!”

Several other cases

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed a troubling increase in the number of young women losing their lives after engaging in ‘hook-up’ activities.

This term, often used to describe casual sexual encounters, has taken on a more transactional connotation in Nigeria, with many young women resorting to it as a means of survival in the face of economic hardship.

However, this perilous path has frequently led to tragic outcomes, highlighting the broader issue of violence against sex workers in the country.

Ndudim and Tandoh’s case is not isolated.

In October 2023, a young woman named Mary Okoro was found dead in a hotel room in Lagos.

She had been there to meet a client she had arranged a ‘hook-up’ with through social media.

The man was later apprehended and confessed to having killed her after a payment dispute.

In another instance, Blessing Omo, a university student in Benin City, was found dead in December 2023 after she went to meet a man who had promised her money for sex.

Her body was discovered in a shallow grave near the man’s house.

The suspect, who was apprehended, admitted to killing her in a fit of rage.

These cases underscore the extreme risks young women face in the ‘hook-up’ scene, often leading to fatal outcomes.

The rise in such incidents has sparked public outcry and raised questions about the underlying socio-economic conditions driving young women into these dangerous situations.

A social commentator and women’s rights activists, Mrs Mercy Chepaka, speaking on the matter said the violence experienced by those engaging in ‘hook-up’ is part of a broader pattern of violence against sex workers in Nigeria.

She said, “Sex workers, including those in street-based, brothel-based, and online arrangements, face a high risk of physical and sexual violence, often with little recourse to justice.

“These young girls must be found. The government and the police should do everything possible to uncover what needs to be uncovered so the families involved can have closure.”

Further speaking, she said, “The tragic deaths of young women involved in ‘hook-up’ activities highlight a significant and distressing issue within Nigerian society.

“The violence against sex workers, driven by economic desperation and compounded by legal and social neglect, demands urgent attention.

“By addressing the root causes and providing safer, legal avenues for women to earn a living, Nigeria can begin to tackle this pervasive problem and protect its most vulnerable citizens.”

A study conducted in 2022 by the International Centre for Reproductive Health in Nigeria found that nearly 50 per cent of sex workers in Lagos had experienced violence from clients, police officers, or strangers in the past year.

The violence ranged from physical assault to rape, often occurring in settings where sex workers are most vulnerable, such as secluded areas or clients’ homes.

The legal and social framework in Nigeria exacerbates this violence.

Sex work is criminalised, leading to a situation where sex workers cannot report crimes committed against them for fear of arrest.

This lack of protection emboldens perpetrators, who know their victims are unlikely to seek help from the authorities.