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Anambra hospital killed my baby because I am disabled – Visually impaired woman

Marachi Ogbaeri, a visually impaired civil servant in Anambra State is still traumatised by her harrowing birth experience. She tells IKENNA OBIANERI how her newborn died due to alleged negligence of health workers in a primary health centre, how she went through remedial surgery after undergoing a caesarean section, and her quest for justice

How has it been working with the Anambra State Govt as a visually impaired civil servant?

It has been good. I work with the Anambra State Ministry of Education. I am 35 years old and hail from the Ihiala Local Government Area of the state. My husband, who is also visually impaired, is from Imuhia in Abia State.

Did you lose your sight at birth or later in life?

I was not born blind. I lost my sight at the age of four on an ill-managed eye problem. When the problem started, a doctor told my parents that my eye needed to be operated on. He initially carried out the surgery on one eye, and within a week, operated on the second one without waiting for the other to heal properly. During the surgery, the doctor made a mistake by cutting an artery, which led to internal haemorrhage and other complications. That was what led to my blindness.

What challenges have you faced since you became visually impaired?

Growing up, it was very difficult to come to terms with the fact that I was not like other children. I still saw myself thinking and doing things sighted children did. If they jumped, I would jump but I kept getting injured until it dawned on me that my sight was a limitation.

It was not easy until my parents took me to a special school for the blind where I learnt to cope both physically and mentally. When I finished the special school, I proceeded to a public secondary school, where I went through lots of challenges among sighted students.

At times, finding someone to assist me in carrying out some chores or activities was difficult.

How did you meet your husband and what are the daily challenges as a visually impaired couple?

We met during our National Youth Service Corps days. At first, I didn't believe he was serious when he proposed. I felt the union would not work but after he persisted, we got married. It has been challenging both financially but we have been managing to cope and are happy with each other.

You lost your newborn shortly after delivery. What actually transpired?

A few months ago, I lost my baby shortly after childbirth due to the negligence of the doctor and other staff on duty. That was my second child.

I became pregnant in late 2023 and registered for antenatal care at a primary healthcare centre in Okpuno, a community in Awka South Local Government Area.

Due to lack of money, I stayed for some months before registering for ANC. At that time, there was no money to even eat well. It was my mother that gave me money to register for ANC.

What happened next after the registration?
I registered for ANC in December 2023 and continued going for checkups until my due date. At even months, I was asked to go for a scan and the result showed that my baby was fine.

However, before my due date, I felt uncomfortable and asked the matron if I could go for another scan, but she said no.

On Saturday, April 9, 2024, I went into labour at midnight and was rushed to the PHC by my husband.

We were made to wait until 5 am unattended before one of the nurses on duty came to inform us that it wouldn't be possible for me to have my baby at the hospital.

What did the nurse say exactly was the reason?

She said the hospital could not handle my delivery and would have to refer me to another hospital. We were surprised because all the while that I was going for ANC, nobody said anything like that to me.

Confused, my husband called the matron, who said he was coming immediately, but never showed up until late in the evening of that fateful day and referred me to a private hospital, in Isuanochoa, Awka North LGA. The hospital was quite a distance from the PHC.

How did you get there?

Before the matron arrived, my mother and sister had come, and together with my husband, they chartered a



tricycle that took me to Isuanochoa that night.

We arrived at the hospital at about midnight and were told to deposit N120,000.

My husband didn't have the money and had to start calling and asking people for help. We got some money but it was not up to the amount demanded.

What happened thereafter?

Because the money was not enough, the doctor and nurses refused to attend to me. I was in great pain and kept crying.

The few times the doctor came out was to tell me to stop making noise.

After some time, I was given anaesthesia and I became unconscious. I didn't know when the C/S was carried out but my mother told me that when she walked into the theatre during the surgery, she saw a pool of blood on the floor and had to ask the doctor what was happening.

According to her, the doctor held her hands and said, "Madam, madam! If you want your daughter to be alive, bring N40,000 now so we can buy blood. Either you borrow from the bank or call relatives to bring it."

My mother had to call my brother and younger sister for more money. They transferred N40,000 into the doctor's account.

The man in charge of the blood bank had to come that night to supply two pints of blood for transfusion.

Where was your husband when all this was happening?

He was not allowed to come close to the theatre. The health workers and other staff were very rude to him, maybe, because he is visually impaired.

After the operation, the doctor called him and my mother into his office and told them to pay another N100,000 for treatment to continue.

As they were trying to negotiate the payment, he ordered them out of his office.

What about the baby at this point?

I became conscious at about 2 am while still inside the theatre and was in so much pain. The doctor didn't give me any pain reliever. I experienced excruciating pain till daybreak.

I didn't see my baby, and when we asked the doctor, he said when the baby, a male, came out, he had complications.

According to him, the placenta ruptured and he blew the uterus, scattered the uterus, and they needed to arrange the uterus, and while trying to arrange the uterus, the baby died.

The doctor later said after some efforts, my baby was brought back to life.

He just kept on coming up with several stories like the baby ate faeces (meconium), the early stool passed by newborns, usually within the first 24 to 48 hours after birth.) in the womb, and it poisoned him.

The doctor also said that my baby had become an imbecile because he stayed too long in the womb due to prolonged labour and that he was better off dead.

What exactly did he say happened to the child?

According to the doctor, my baby stayed for about two days before dying.

But I am unhappy that the hospital did not let us feel or touch him. At least, my mother was there and could have seen him.

His care was not prioritised; he was not placed in an intensive care unit despite the struggle he went through during the labour and delivery process.

The doctor said that due to the extended labour, when the baby came out, he was placed on intravenous fluid for several hours but we later found out that he lied to us.

Based on our findings, they never gave him the medical attention he required and they abandoned him because we were disabled.

How did the doctor explain that to you?

But while the baby was still alive, the same doctor told my husband and mother to bring more money so he could buy the things needed to address the issues he observed.

The doctor collected money from my husband at about 9 am that fateful day and left. We didn't see him again until about 10 pm.

He came back without buying anything for the treatment he claimed. Instead, he went straight to where my baby was kept and repositioned him.

One hour later, he told my mother and husband that the child was dead.

In the doctor's absence, what were the nurses doing?

Before leaving, the doctor instructed them to stop attending to me and my baby. Even when the child died, we were not told until two days later.

How did you learn about the death since you were still unconscious?

At first, even my husband and mother did not tell me about it. They were hiding it from me because of my condition at that moment.

Then, I was drifting in and out of consciousness and my mother was watching over me.

During one of the moments I was a bit conscious, my cousin called and I overheard her consoling my mother over the death of my baby. That was when I got to know that my baby was dead.

At that point, I just started praying to leave the hospital alive.

It was when I fully regained consciousness that I was informed but it was not news to me anymore.

How has this affected you?

After my baby was buried, I stayed for one week at the hospital.

Whilst there, complications kept arising. I didn't eat for four days, had no bowel movements, and was still taking drips.

At a point, the doctor recommended I go for another surgery, which I refused until they finally discharged me.

But then, I was still having health challenges until some colleagues and family members took me to another hospital where I was operated and several errors made by the first doctor were corrected. It took me a while to fully recover.

Who recommended the first hospital to you?

It was the matron at the PHC in Okpuno that recommended the health facility. We got to know that the doctor works at the public health department in the Anambra State Ministry of Health.

We also got to know that he is allegedly not a qualified doctor, but unfortunately, we didn't know all these facts because we were referred there by someone we felt knew better.

Overall, how much did you spend?

When I was discharged, the doctor gave us a bill of N385,500. My mother, who was tired from crying went to remind the doctor that the baby he was charging so much for his delivery was dead and begged him to reduce the bill.

He only removed N25,000, bringing the bill down to N360,000.

We were able to raise some money after reaching out to people for help.

By the time we had raised a substantial amount of money, my husband met with the doctor again and begged him to release me so I could get better treatment elsewhere as my condition was getting more critical.

He refused and told my husband to charge him to court or do his worst. He insisted that the bill must be paid in full.

Having gone through these ordeals, do you want justice?

What the doctor did was a big damage. His negligence and incompetence led to the death of my son.

He didn't show any form of remorse for what happened at his hospital.

But sadly, we can't press for damages or compensation. At the moment, things are difficult. The money we borrowed for my treatment, we are yet to finish paying.

What I want the Anambra State Government and the Ministry of Health to know is that such a hospital is meant to be closed down.

There are many of such hospitals around and they are not qualified to treat human beings because this is human life.

The state government should look into our case and have the doctor's activities investigated.

My husband and I need help. Since I left the hospital, feeding has been a major challenge. The salary I earn is small and can't offset the bill. My husband, who is a lawyer, is still looking for a job. After youth service, he worked briefly in the civil service.

At this point, we need help to survive and are using this opportunity to call on well-meaning individuals to hear our cry and help us.

Most times, we go to bed on an empty stomach. What happened during my delivery was a setback to us, and we are yet to recover from it.

Though not very strong yet, I have resumed work but the cost of transportation is eating deep into my salary and at the end of the day, nothing is left to cater to our needs. We need help.

I am using this opportunity to call on well-meaning Nigerians to come to our aid.

Some people are using you and your husband's photographs to solicit funds on social media. Are you aware of this?

We have heard about it, but unfortunately, the Android phone I had was stolen when I was pregnant.

We did not know what was happening online until some of our friends called my husband to tell him about it. My sister also came across the post.

We are surprised about this because we don't know those posting about us on social media. It is bad for people to use our situation to enrich themselves while we are here struggling.

As I am talking to you now, we don't have anything. We don't even know where and when our next meal will come.

We struggle to eat, and it is with the help of people, yet, some people are using us to solicit help. Those doing that should stop.

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