

Crime

How greed drives girls to being killed by Facebook lovers

Taiwo Jimoh

Murder

It has become a disturbing trend in Nigeria for young girls who engage in hookup on social media to end up being killed in gruesome ways.

Lately, some criminally minded persons have taken over the Facebook and other social media platforms turning them into a death trap, where young girls involved in sleeping with men for money are killed and their bodies sold to ritualists.

This term, hookup often used to describe casual sexual encounters for financial benefits, 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 against sex workers in the country.

Recent killing

There is the recent case of missing ladies, Celine Nduim from Nigeria and Afiba Tandoh from Ghana who embarked on their ill-fated journey on April 27, travelling from Port Harcourt to Aba, Abia State. Their destination was the residence of one Andrew Ocheokwo (Amechi), a man based in the Ogor Hill area of Aba.

Ocheokwo, who is also 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.

However, a rights activist, Harrison Gwamnishu and the Intelligence Response Team of the police from the Force Intelligence Bureau discovered a decomposed body in a bush near Ocheokwo's Aba residence.

"On Monday at about 10 p.m., we arrived in Aba in 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 Ogor 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. While, a curtain used to wrap the body matched one seen in Ocheokwo's residence, hinting at a possible connection to the missing women.

How it happened

Celine's sister, who simply identified herself as 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.

Tessy 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



Celine Nduim and Afiba Tandoh

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," 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.

Human rights

Meanwhile, a human rights activist, Harrison Gwamnishu, brought another alarming situation to light through a series of its Facebook posts.

He disclosed that Ocheokwo had allegedly held Nduim and Tandoh hostage after their arrival.

In May, Gwamnishu announced that the ladies had gone missing, and Ocheokwo 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, Ocheokwo reportedly refused to confess to any wrongdoing.

Gwamnishu shared that numerous other women came forward with testimonies, claiming that Ocheokwo 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 Ocheokwo was living in relative comfort while in custody. The situation took a grim turn when Gwamnishu revealed in another post that Ocheokwo had been killed while being transported by policemen from Aba to Abuja.

"Before I left Delta with the victims' families to Abuja, I got a call that Andrew Ocheokwo, the

man who allegedly kidnapped the two friends, was killed.

The police said while they were taking the suspect to Abuja, the man tried to escape and he was shot dead," Gwamnishu explained in a video uploaded on Facebook again.

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

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

Several other cases

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed a troubling increase in the number of young women losing their lives through Facebook relationships.

A 24-year-old Cynthia Udoka, a postgraduate student and clothing retailer, was murdered by two university students she met on Facebook in 2012. The men lured her to Lagos under the pretence of friendship, tied her up at a hotel, robbed her, and strangled her to death in Festac Town.

In another case, 20-year-old Tynasha Hammond was gunned down while streaming live on Facebook in 2019 in Benue State. The gruesome video of her last moments was widely shared on social media despite her family's pleas to take it down.

Also, a 24-year-old woman, simply identified as Temitope was allegedly lured on Facebook to her lover's house in 2019, and raped at Alagomeji area of Yaba, Lagos State and N15,000, was stolen from her.

An 18-year-old boy named Soliu Majekodunmi also killed his girlfriend Sofiyah, after learning how to perform money ritual on Facebook in 2022. He strangled and beheaded her, claiming he wanted to ride exotic cars and live in luxury apartments.

Also in Abuja, a 44-year-old woman named Charity Chidebere Aiyedogbon went missing after meeting up with a man she met on Facebook in 2021. Her body was later discovered, and the man was arrested for her murder.

In another case, 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 killing 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 she

met on Facebook and 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.

Security expert

A security expert, Mr. Johnson Abiodun, speaking on the risk involved in engaging in hookup by ladies because of money, 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 are fond of material things, these force a lot of them into it, peer pressure is another factor to be considered, my friend bought this, I have to get it myself also lead them into the hookup thing. The get rich syndrome from the young boys is also another issue why they are being used or killed for ritual purposes.

"Many girls have been killed as a result of Internet fraud, by those who want to make money fast. Those who manage to escape always develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the traumatic experience of being assaulted or threatened by someone they met online.

"Others victims may struggle to trust new people they meet online or in person after being betrayed by someone they thought they could trust.

This can make it challenging to form healthy relationships.

"Victims may feel ashamed or blame themselves for what happened and psychological effects of meeting dangerous people online can be long-lasting and severe. It is crucial for online users, especially young people, to be aware of the risks and take precautions when meeting strangers online."

Justice

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

Celine's sister, Tessy Nduim, told *BBC Pidgin* that 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.

Police react

The Inspector-General of Police, Kayode Egbetokun, has directed the Monitoring Unit to conduct a thorough and high-powered investigation into the suspected murder of one Andrew Ocheokwo who was alleged to have killed the two ladies who visited him.

The police boss, in a statement by the Force spokesperson, Muyiwa Adejobi, assured Nigerians that the police would unravel the mystery surrounding the death of Ocheokwo.

According to Egbetokun, the monitoring unit has been given a two-week timeframe to complete its investigation and present a comprehensive report on the case.

The statement read: "This directive comes amid the numerous allegations, arguments, and counterarguments surrounding the case, which also involves the disappearance of two ladies, Celine and Afiba after their trip to visit the said Andrew in Aba, Abia State, for which he was alleged to be responsible.

"The Inspector-General of Police, Egbetokun, has directed the Monitoring Unit to conduct a thorough and high-powered investigation into the suspected murder of one Andrew Ocheokwo."

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