

Insight

Blood Money: Worries over rising epidemic of ritual killings in Nigeria

The desperation to get rich quick, especially among the younger generation across the country, leading to many heinous crimes, has raised concerns in many quarters. **YEMI OLAKITAN** takes a look at the trend

The crave for money by all means, especially among the younger generation has become an alarming trend in Nigeria, fueling fear, suspicion, and calls for urgent intervention. From gruesome murders linked to money rituals or organ harvesting to shocking cases of body parts being used for alleged supernatural powers, the phenomenon exposes deep-rooted socio-economic, cultural, and psychological issues.

A classic example of this growing and alarming phenomenon is an incident that occurred on January 15, 2025 in Abuja. A 32-year-old self-proclaimed Gospel singer, Timileyin Ajayi, admitted to killing his alleged girlfriend, Salome Elejo Adaidu, over suspected infidelity on her.

Ajayi, who has been remanded in the custody of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Nasarawa State Police Command in Lafia, was accused of murdering the 24-year-old National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member, at his residence.

Salome was serving at NICON Insurance in Abuja and was killed during a visit to Ajayi's residence in New Karshi, Karu Local Government Area, Nasarawa State. "I killed her because we don't have each other all the time, it's not something I planned. It happened on that day and it happened," confessed the killer gleefully.

Adding, "Not that I have the plan in mind, she was cheating. She hides most of the things from me most of the time. I got to know from her phone. I saw her chatting with other guys on the phone that was why I decided."

Appearing frail from injuries inflicted by a mob before his arrest, Ajayi confessed without remorse or emotion. When asked if he regretted his actions, he said, "No. I don't have any regrets because life is reciprocal, that is what I thought."

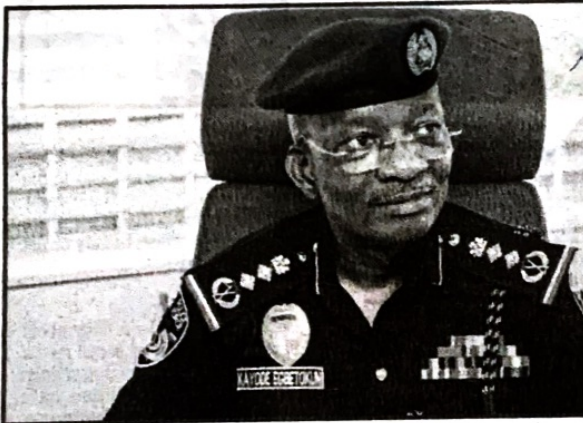
However, Salome's family refuted any claims of a relationship between her and the suspect. Her elder sister, Esther Adaidu, described Ajayi as a stranger to the family and demanded justice.

"This so-called Timi guy, we don't know him. We had never seen him until we were called up to tell us that this guy murdered and dismembered our sister. I demand and need justice to be served to this guy sitting over there because he is the one that murdered my sister and he confirmed it to me," she said.

Salome's case is one of many such gruesome killings in Nigeria. Observers said Ajayi's story was cooked up and that he is



Suspects



IGP Egbetokun

one of the ritualists killing young ladies and trading their body parts for money. Timi's case was one of the too many cases all over the country of criminals murdering innocent young women and butchering them to pieces. In Timi's case, it was reported that he did cut the body of Salome to pieces and put them in polythene bags.

In another recent incident, a suspected ritualist killed and dismembered a final-year student of the Kwara State College of Education in Ilorin, Kwara State. Lawal Hafsoh Yetunde was killed by her boyfriend whom she met on social media. The suspected killer, after the gruesome killing, dismembered her body for alleged ritual purposes.

According to reports, Yetunde went missing on Monday, February 10, 2025. She was at a naming ceremony when she received a call from a friend. According to sources, she dropped her food to answer the call and then left immediately. A source disclosed, "Since then, we've been searching for her everywhere. But no one knew her whereabouts. On Tuesday, her parents reported the case to the Oja Oba Police Station in Ilorin. The police requested her phone number and used it to track

her last call. The call was traced to an individual living in the Offa Garage District area of Ilorin, although his family house is in Isalekuto.

"The suspect was arrested but initially denied knowledge of the lady's whereabouts. However, when the police searched his house, he confessed that the lady was in his area and had died from an asthma attack after he called her to come over."

"Upon further investigation, the police found the lady's body, dismembered and hidden in a bowl, along with the equipment used to dismember her. The suspect is now at the police headquarters in Ilorin."

"Disturbingly, evidence found in the suspect's house suggests this may not be his first offence. A table in his room appeared to be equipped with tools used to dismember bodies."

Meanwhile, the Kwara State Police Command, through its spokesman, Adetoun Ejire-Adeyemi, said investigations are ongoing over the matter.

Earlier this month, police authorities in Akwa Ibom State began a probe into the gruesome murder of a make-up artist, Emrich Effanga. Effanga, who was allegedly killed by her boyfriend, identified as Ndifreke.

In an interview with a retired cleric of the African Methodist Church and Septuagenarian, Pa Theophilus, he said, "Evil communication corrupts good manners. You can actually see that there is a pattern in many of the murders reported by the media. The victims are young women."

"Their bodies were dismembered. This points to one single conclusion: it is a network of gangs targeting young women to be lured through romance scams, by their purported boyfriends or lovers. This is a challenge for the Nigerian Police and they must unravel it

and put an end to it."

"It always begins from the university campuses. While cult groups and confraternities thrive in Nigerian higher institutions beat anyone's imagination. It appears, however, that these cult groups have tended to move out of the campuses to mainstream society to perpetrate heinous crimes. The responsibility lies on the hands of authorities to put an end to this."

"If we will all follow the instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the book of Matthew 22:39, which says, love your neighbour as yourself and love God with all your heart. There is no way one will do harm to his neighbors. It's the lack of the fear of God and evil company, mixing with the wrong crowd added with the craze for fast money at all costs, these are the root causes of these menace."

In a viral video on social media, an unnamed individual had taken his girlfriend to a hotel room and tied her up; tooth and neck with plans to kill her for ritual purposes. However, his plot was exposed by the hotel security guard who overheard him on a phone call asking his co-conspirator whether they should bring the girl to the ritual place or "we should do the ritual at the hotel room." He was caught and handed over to the police.

On February 16, 2024, the Ogun State Police Command arrested seven persons in connection with the disappearance of one Sulaimon Adijat, a 35-year-old woman, who was reported missing by her parents. The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO), Omolola Odutola, disclosed that the Divisional Police Officer of Onipanu Divisional headquarters received a report of a missing person on January 9, at about 1000hrs.

She said one Sulaimon Adijat, a female, aged 35 years, was invited out on a date by one Adebayo Azeez, a male, of Ajegunle Road, Atan Ota in Ogun State.

She noted that since then the said lady had not been seen despite frantic efforts to locate her and that her mobile phone had

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been switched off since she was reported missing.

Odotola stated that a tactical team, specifically the anti-kidnapping unit of the Command, was drafted to unravel the mystery behind her disappearance.

She disclosed that the team embarked on a technical-based investigation, which led to the arrest of the seven suspects, who participated actively in the abduction and eventual murder of the missing lady. The suspects include; Sheriff Agbai, Osojiahen Alioneitouria; Samuel Monday, an herbalist; Peter Oluwalolose, a prophet; Jamiu Yusuf, another prophet; Abidemi Moses, another herbalist; and Adebayo Azeez.

According to the police spokesperson, "investigation revealed that on 19 November 2023, one Sheriff Agbai 'male', and Osojiahen Alioneitouria 'male', contacted Oluwo Samuel Monday 'male', fondly called Oluwo Mandela, to perform money ritual known as 'Oshole' that can produce N200 million within seven days!

"And Oluwo Samuel Monday charged the duo of Agbai, and Alioneitouria the sum of N800, 000 and agreed to prepare the materials for the money ritual." In furtherance of his criminal intention, Mr Monday reportedly contacted Mr Oluwalolose, who was not new in the trade of human parts, to source for a lady between the ages of 18 and 20 years to deliver her mutilated body parts, specifically the head, two breasts, private part and her two wrists, to be used for the money ritual."

Chilling discoveries

In another development, the Anambra State Government demolished a hotel harbouring over 30 secret graves, a shrine, and live ammunition. The hotel, Udoka Golden Point Hotel and Suites, also known as "La Cruise Hotel," was located along the Onitsha-Owerri Road and was identified as a hotspot for kidnapping, ritual killings and other criminal activities.

The state's security unit, Agumchemba, carried out the operation, dubbed "Operation Udo Ga-Achi," and discovered a chilling array of incriminating evidence, including: over 30 secret graves, meticulously sectioned off on the top floor, a shrine with live cartridges and ammunition, a pot containing blood, seized and taken to the SARS Office in Awkuzu, feathers and other ritual items. They also found Army uniforms and live cartridges.

Christian Aburime, Chief Press Secretary to Governor Chukwuma Soludo, confirmed the demolition and emphasised that the community had long suspected illicit activities at the hotel. Residents had reportedly heard gunshots at night but were too afraid to report them.

The demolition is part of a broader security initiative under the newly enacted Homeland Security Law of 2025. The state government had warned that properties linked to crimes like kidnapping, robbery, or murder will be demolished, and their owners prosecuted.

Causes

Why are ritual killings on the rise? Who are the masterminds behind these dark acts? And what can be done to stop the bloodshed? These questions are regularly burning in the minds of concerned Nigerians.

Ritual killings involve the murder of individuals, often with their body parts harvested, for spiritual or supernatural purposes or for sale. The belief is that such sacrifices can bring wealth, power, protection, or political or material success. These acts are often carried out by individuals seeking quick riches, politicians desperate for power, or occult groups operating in secrecy.

While such practices have existed in parts of Nigeria for decades, recent years have seen a disturbing rise, with social media and get-rich-quick mentalities driv-

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Salome Adaidu

Timileyin Ajayi



Lawal Hafsoh Yetunde

Emrich Effanga

ing more young people into these deadly activities.

Many perpetrators of ritual killings believe in the concept of 'blood money,' the idea that sacrificing a human life can attract sudden riches. With Nigeria's economic hardship and high unemployment rates, many desperate youths fall prey to false promises from spiritualists and herbalists who claim to have the power to make them wealthy overnight.

Some politicians and influential figures are rumoured to engage in ritual killings to secure power, protection, or electoral victories. The belief is that certain sacrifices can guarantee dominance over opponents or attract supernatural favour.

Numerous cult groups and underground societies perform ritual sacrifices as initiation rites or to strengthen their influence. These groups, often involving students and urban gangs, carry out killings to prove loyalty and access perceived mystical powers.

Certain traditional beliefs and occult rituals promote the use of human body parts for charms, potions, or spiritual fortification. Some native doctors and self-proclaimed 'Oniseun' herbalists exploit these beliefs, encouraging ritual killings for personal gain.

The concept of Yahoo Plus, a popular slang in Nigeria's local parlance, is another dimension that has taken Nigerian society by storm. The term Yahoo Yahoo was popularly used to describe advance fee fraud that has become pervasive among Nigerian youths.

Yahoo Plus seems to be a step higher than Yahoo Yahoo, according to New Telegraph investigations. This involves

ritual killings, organ harvesting and cultic rings. There are too many cases in the news in recent times putting the lives of young girls and women in danger since it appears that these killers mostly target young women and girls.

Tackling the menace

Mr Bori Moses, CEO of Oluwabori Global noted that the rise of social media and Nollywood movies portraying sudden wealth and 'blood money' rituals have worsened the problem. Many youths now believe that human sacrifices can bring instant success, leading to a surge in ritual-related crimes.

Moses said, "Nollywood movie producers must respond drastically to the problem we are facing today. For years, they have produced hundreds of money ritual stories in their movies to the extent that our youth have come to believe that it was possible to become rich through the shedding of human blood. Our youths have failed to separate reality from fiction. They have now come to believe that the road to wealth and their desire for cars, all the toys they desire can be found in blood money. It got to a point that once you see Kanayo O. Kanayo in a movie, you know it's a money ritual movie, although the end of money ritual stories are usually tragic, the youths do not mind as long as they have the wealth for a season before they die," he noted.

Eminent cleric of the Yoruba Ifa traditional religion, Baba Yemi Elebunibon also made the same point in an interview, he said, "the way we call ourselves, is the way we will be described in the outside world." He narrated an incident in Brazil, where he interacted with a young woman whom he asked to follow him to Nigeria and become his wife.

"The young woman replied, saying she will not follow him because he will use her for money rituals. The Baba said he was alarmed and demanded to know why she said that, the young woman said, that was what she saw in Nigerian movies.

"Our movie makers must do better, they must find stories from our history and culture that depict heroism, courage and charity instead of dwelling endlessly on the subject of money rituals."

In an Interview with New Telegraph, Mrs Shola Abimbola, an educationist at a Mission school, in Ogun State, disclosed that the Police should question Ajayi well. "He is probably a member of a cultic ring specialised in human rituals or organ harvesting. Ritual killings have become a menace in our society today, the government ought to rise up and take action.

"I know they are busy with the fight against terrorism and all that but they need to wake up to this menace as well. Ritual killings are worse than terrorism these days because they work quietly and silently, it seems to be that they are a network of criminals targeting mostly young women in the society.

"There should be an agency for the Investigations of homicides in Nigeria; an agency that would be responsible for Intelligence gathering, arrests and prosecution, a special arm of the Nigerian police that will focus on homicidal syndicates so they can daily burst their nets. They are all around us with the desperate drive for money. I am convinced that there is a mafia-like organization involved in these killings. It's getting too much in the news."

The Nigerian government must implement stricter penalties for those involved in ritual killings. Law enforcement agencies should crack down on herbalists, occultists, and cult groups promoting such practices. Yahoo boys or Yahoo Plus boys should suffer the harshest punishments possible under the Nigerian legal system. This is crucial to deter others who may be tempted to follow their steps.

It is also necessary to invest in Nigerian intelligence infrastructure and technology. The federal and state governments must invest in training and retraining our secret service operations. The lives of our children are in danger, especially the female gender. They must invest in technology and learn from advanced policing operations from more advanced nations.

There also is an urgent need to educate the citizens, especially young people, on the dangers of ritual killings. Religious and community leaders must work together to debunk the myths surrounding "blood money."

While traditional medicine is part of Nigeria's heritage, there must be stronger oversight to prevent the abuse of rituals for criminal purposes.

Many ritual killings stem from economic desperation. Providing better job opportunities, youth empowerment programs, sports development and social welfare can help reduce the temptation to seek wealth through deadly means.

At crossroads

Ritual killings in Nigeria are not just about crime; they reflect deeper social issues: poverty, greed, ignorance, and a distorted value system. To stop this deadly trend, Nigerians must confront the root causes and reject the glorification of wealth at any cost.

The question remains: Will Nigeria wake up to the horror of ritual killings and put an end to this nightmare, or will the bloodshed continue? The answer lies in collective action and a shift in societal values.