

Inside Abuja

Wasted effort **24**

Corn season at great cost

Tragedy: Sex worker found dead in hotel room

The recent suspected ritual killing of a young lady in an obscure apartment in Gwarimpa, cities may have exposed what young ladies seeking better life in suffer on daily basis, **CALEB ONWE** reports

As the sun sinks behind the rooftops of Gwarimpa, Africa's largest housing estate, shadows stretch across the bustling community ushering in a different rhythm of life.

During the day, Gwarimpa exudes quiet affluence. A visit to the sprawling model housing estate will reveal that it has an array of exotic vehicles gliding past elegant duplexes and hawkers navigating a labyrinth of paved streets. At nightfall, a starkly different world hitherto, hidden from plain sight, emerges. Investigations have revealed that the sex trade in red light districts is an everyday experience. It is the nest of the 'Big Girls' who rule the night, having fun in the numerous night clubs, lounges and hotels. A group of them could be living in a modest one-room apartment tucked behind one of the cornershops. In Gwarimpa, cornershops are places within the neighbourhood of the estate, where residents are supposed to satisfy their shopping desires.

However, given the metropolitan nature of the capital city these inclusive planned designs have been distorted and abused by residents.

Cornershop apartments

Majority of the cornershops, found in almost all the sections of the estate, have been turned into residential apartments.

Inside Abuja's findings showed that some of these cornershops, which is just a normal size of about 11 by 12 square metres in size, could house between 10 to 12 girls.

These large number of young women live together, bound not by blood but by the spirit of survival. They are sex workers otherwise known as call girls, hustlers, or runs girls in local parlance. Each if them has a past, a present steeped in the hustle, and a future blurred by uncertainty.

The FCT Police Command has confirmed the death of one lady, identified as Aladi Ofikwu Johnson, also known as Tessy. Her lifeless body was said to have been picked up from a Cornershop Apartment, on 3rd Avenue, Gwarimpa, where she had gone for her night hustle. She was found dead in one of the obscure apart with her hands tied behind her back.

Tessy is one of Gwarimpa's 'big girls' who was allegedly murdered by suspected ritual killers.

The spokesperson of the Police, Josephine Adeh confirmed the incident, saying: "The FCT Police Command is aware of a disturb-



Tessy, before her murder

ing viral video showing a young woman found unconscious with her hands tied behind her in a hotel room located in the Gwarimpa area of Abuja.

"In swift response to the tragic incident, the Commissioner of Police, FCT, CP Ajao S. Adewale, has ordered a thorough and discreet investigation into the circumstances surrounding the unfortunate incident.

"Preliminary investigation reveals that the victim, later identified as Aladi Ofikwu Johnson, also known as Tessy, a female from Benue State, checked into a hotel located at 3rd Avenue, Gwarimpa, on 16th June, 2025, in the company of an unidentified male who was later observed to have exited the premises without her.

"The victim was discovered unconscious by hotel staff during routine service rounds, prompting immediate notification to the Police. She was confirmed dead upon medical evaluation.

"While the investigation is ongoing, the Commissioner of Police urges members of the public to remain calm and allow the Police to carry out a comprehensive inquiry.

"The Commissioner advises young ladies to exercise caution in their interactions, especially with unfamiliar individuals, and to always share their whereabouts with trusted friends or family members for safety purposes.

"He also calls on hotel operators to strengthen internal security protocols, including mandatory identity verification for guests and the installation of functional surveillance systems to aid both deterrence and investigation.

"The Command commiserates with the family of the deceased and assures that every effort is being made to bring the perpetrator(s) to justice."

Sleeping in shifts

It was this unfortunate incident that prompted Inside Abuja to go down to the red light districts of Gwarimpa to see things as they are. Our investigations revealed that owners of these cornershops are really cashing out

from hosting these desperate young ladies, who care less about their safety, but just to eke out a living. It was learnt that these 'queens of the night' pay between N10,000 and N15,000 rent on weekly basis.

Inside Abuja learnt that owners of these shops, turned to 'refuge' homes, make up to N100,000 to N150,000 weekly from these ladies, and up to N500,000 monthly from one cornershops apartment.

One of them, simply identified as Dooshima said:

"I haven't slept on a bed in months."

Dooshima, 22-year-old hails from Benue State. According to her, she perches on the edge of a sagging mattress that takes up most of the room. The rest of the space is cluttered with nylon bags, a half-broken standing fan, and scattered slippers.

"We sleep in shifts because there's no space," she explains. "When some of us go out to hustle, the others sleep. Then we switch."

Their room costs N500,000 per month—a figure that, when split ten ways, is the only affordable option for many of them. For girls like Dooshima, who came to Abuja seeking greener pastures, the reality is far from what she imagined.

Dream to desperation

Each story is different, yet painfully similar. Another lady, Fatima, a 25 year old, who hails from Kaduna state, said sleeping in such jam-packed apartment is no issue at all.

She said: "I came to Abuja thinking I'd find a job as a receptionist. But everywhere I went, they asked for experience or connections. When the money I brought finished, I started sleeping with men for survival. Then someone introduced me to this place."

Investigation revealed that many of the girls come from broken homes, or from families who have no idea what their daughters are doing in the capital city.

Most arrived with dreams—to study, to work, to escape poverty. But without qualifications, and with rent, food, and transport

demanding immediate answers, prostitution became the only answer that came quickly.

The room is more than just a living space. It's a dressing room, a war room, a sanctuary, and sometimes, a battlefield. Fights are common.

"Imagine 10 girls with different backgrounds, hustling for the same clients," says another girl, who claims that she is from Rivers State.

According to this young lady, known as Kiki, the oldest among them at 29. "Jealousy, betrayal, even physical fights happen. But we have nowhere else to go."

It was discovered that these young hustlers do not have the time to cook. They, on a daily basis rely on food vendors around the area.

Daily gamble

Inside Abuja gathered that beyond the walls of their rooms lie a world fraught with danger. The girls work primarily around Gwarimpa's streets and night clubs, where they scout for clients between 8:00 p.m. and 4:00a.m.

"We don't know who's a real client and who's a ritualist or police," says Blessing, another young girl known in the area to be from Ondo state.

She said, "Some men beat you. Some don't pay. Some drug you."

She added that: "arrests are common, especially during normal Police raids.

A source around the area disclosed that one of the girls known as Ebere, a lady said to hail from Enugu almost died of sexually transmitted infection.

It was said that when sick, they rely on each other or unlicensed pharmacies. Few can afford to go to the hospital. According to them, Ebere, nearly died from an untreated STI last year.

A source said "She was bleeding for days, the girls had to contribute to take her to a chemist. She left Abuja after that."

With such hardship, one wonders why they don't leave?

"Where would we go?" Blessing asks, shrugging. "Even at home, there's no food. Here, at least, if I see one man in a day, I can eat."

Inside Abuja gathered that a few of the girls have dreams of leaving the sex trade.

One of them, Kiki wants to open a hair salon. "I'm saving, small small," she says. "Maybe next year I'll rent a shop. But it's hard. Sometimes, you use everything you make to pay rent and buy pads."

Gwarimpa's residents are not oblivious of what is happening in their neighbourhood. "We see the girls," says Tosin, a shop owner along 2nd Avenue. "But what can we do? The economy is hard. Everybody is just trying to survive."

Some landlords rent rooms knowingly "As long as they pay rent and don't bring trouble," one landlord told this reporter on condition of anonymity, "it's not my business."

Silent epidemic

What is happening in Gwarimpa is not isolated. Across Nigeria, economic hardship, youth unemployment, and social decay continue to push young women into desperate choices. In communities where affluence and poverty sit side-by-side, the contrast is even starker.

For the ten girls in that small room, each night is a fresh battle—to earn, to endure, to dream just a little longer. And each morning, they return to the room, strip off the night's war paint, and curl up wherever there is space, until sundown when next shift begins.

ONWUKA NZESHI
ABUJA BUREAU CHIEF

nzeshi@newtelegraphonline.com