

Metro

Contacts: 08023145281
08033274032
017614680175

By Esther Onyegbula

Except proper forensic investigation is carried out to unravel the circumstances surrounding the death of Rejoice Ukpai, a 24-year-old teacher and her 13-month-old baby whose corpses were found in a canal around Awojadun Street in Abaranje community, Ikotun area of Lagos, their deaths would soon be added to the statistics of unresolved deaths having a semblance of murder and suicide.

Rejoice carried her son, Divine, at about 8:00 pm on Monday night after telling her live-in-lover, Ekene Ukpai that she was going to give someone money for contribution within the community.

Vanguard Metro learned that later that night at about 10:00 pm, Rejoice and her son were seen wandering aimlessly within a bush path around Awojadun Street. Some of the residents who saw her wandering asked her what she was doing at that time of the night with her child, she said she was looking for a place to rest. Unfortunately, the corpses of Rejoice and the toddler were discovered at dawn on Tuesday by residents in the community.

When Vanguard Metro visited the scene of the incident on Wednesday morning, a resident who identified himself as Abiodun said: "At about 9:00 pm on Monday, the woman was seen with her son wandering around. When the community security saw her, they asked her what she was doing close to the bush path that leads to the canal, she said she wanted to rest."

On Tuesday morning, I was surprised when I heard they were dead. I rushed to the scene, when I saw their corpses, it was as if the baby was sleeping and his eyes were still open. The woman was wearing a pair of blue jean trousers and a T-shirt. But part of her mouth has been mutilated by the content of the substance she drank, revealing her teeth."

Speaking of the incident, 84-year-old Baale of Abaranje kingdom, Lamidi Ayinde Hassan said: "I was about to retire to bed Monday night at about 11:00 pm when I received a call from one of the landlords called Old soldier who lives very close to the scene of the incident." Old soldier said he came out of his house and found a woman and her baby lying side by side at the canal close to his house. He further explained that at that time, it appeared the woman was still alive as she was still

Controversy over school teacher, son's death Suicide or Murder?



• Rejoice



• Ekene

breathing but the child looked dead.

"Immediately, I advised him to report to the police station. I didn't hear from him again till on Tuesday morning when another resident, a pastor who owns a house there said the woman and her baby were dead. I explained to him that Old soldier had informed the police. The pastor said you know the police won't come except they are mobilised."

Fortunately, between 10/11 am on Tuesday, the police from Isheri Divisional Police came and recovered the remains of the mother and child. The CDA chairman of the community was arrested and later released after the police took his statement.

When this reporter visited their apartment at Shoye Odunona Street behind a private hospital, their personal effects were scattered everywhere. The foam was placed on the wall while the baby's wardrobe stood in one corner.

The sandals Rejoice wore

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back from work was on the floor. A camp gas and a pot sat beside the cupboard while the bereaved young man looked helplessly.

Still trying to process what the mother of his son had done, Ekene said: "We don't have any problems; like most young couples, we once in a while have our disagreement which we resolve within ourselves. What I understand in everything that has hap-

pened is that she had determined to take her life, that is the only explanation for her action."

The only thing that troubles me in life is how to work hard and earn a living legitimately."

She returned from work where she teaches at Isheri at about 6:00 pm, washed plates and did her normal chores. Initially, she said she was going to church for vigil, later, she said she wants to give someone money for contribution. I asked her to wait so I can put on my shirt. When I came out, she had already left with our son. She didn't go with anything, not even her phone or bag.

"I don't know if she had issues at her place of work because she is a very secretive person, you can't tell when she is troubled. So I can't tell if she had issues at her place of work, is that enough to take her life and that of our son? There is no one who isn't facing one challenge or the other. I have suffered huge frustrations and setbacks in life. I was scammed while trying to procure a visa to travel to China but nothing on earth would make me take my life. I have struggled so much, but life is what it is."

"It is because of her and

our son that I drive tricycle so I can provide for them. So if at all she had something bothering her, she never mentioned it to me. We have never had a serious misunderstanding that should make her take her life. If she has a little conscience, she wouldn't have killed our son. Even if we had a misunderstanding, wouldn't it be better if she moved out of the house, go somewhere till the situation calms down or things are resolved instead of taking her life and that of our son? If she has a human feeling, she wouldn't have taken our son along with her. If she had even left him outside the compound, at the roadside or at a neighbour's, people who see him would notify me and we will start looking for her. Why kill our son who knows nothing? He probably drank the substance she gave him thinking it is juice."

Explaining further, Ekene said: "I waited for her to return all through the night, there was no way I could reach her as she left her phone at home. It was her church pastor who lives in that area that called me very early on Tuesday morning. He said I should come immediately that something has happened. When I got there, I saw her and my son lying lifeless."

"Residents at the scene said the security personnel saw her and our son wandering within that area at about 10:00pm on Monday. There is even a church member who said they saw her walking in that direction; when he asked her what she was doing in that area, she said she came to see someone. They said when she continued wandering around, they asked her what was wrong, she said she wants to rest. What I still don't understand is why the security people saw her wandering around at that time of the night with a little child and didn't suspect that something was wrong at that time of the night."

"Where did she buy sniper? How come she and my son had red oil on their mouth and clothes? Who gave them red oil? The people who saw her roaming around that night are the ones who can assist to unravel what happened to her."

"Can you believe that when I called her siblings, they asked me to dump her corpse into the canal? According to them, she disowned them while she was alive so they don't want to have anything to do with her even in death."

Rejoice is from Calabar while I am from Ebonyi State, we are not married, we were dating and she got pregnant and we started living together."

"Before now, there was a time she tried something like this. That was when she was pregnant with our son. She wanted to drink detergent but I stopped her."