

## NEWS

# How my daughter died like fowl — Lawani, father of 19yr-old undergraduate

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•Alleges cover-up, demands justice

## •We're awaiting Police, NASS report — School

By Henry Ojelu

Kassim Lawani, a Civil Engineer based in Port Harcourt, Rivers State is not a happy man; no one who has lost a beautiful and intelligent daughter in an unexplainable condition would be.

At birth, Engr. Lawani knew by instinct that his second child, Eweme, was a special gift and christened her 'Precious' aside from her other names. Precious grew up to prove his father right by exhibiting high level of academic intelligence and outperforming her peers in every contest.

During her graduation from primary school, Precious scooped many gifts and awards presented by the school management. In secondary school, she repeated the same feat. The future was indeed bright for Precious and Engr. Lawani resolved that no amount of money was too big to spend to ensure that she gets the best education.

After initial hiccups occasioned by ASUU strike and the Covid-19 pandemic, Precious finally settled for an A-Level (JUPEB) Medicine and Surgery, programme at the BOWEN University, Iwo, Oyo State. Barely two weeks after her resumption, Precious died under a strange circumstance that is yet to be unravelled two years after.

### How it happened

Fighting back tears, Engr. Lawani narrated to Encounter, how the joy of seeing his daughter eventually following the path to fulfilling her quest of becoming a medical doctor suddenly turned into sorrow for his entire family.

He said: "My daughter, Precious Eweme Lawani, was admitted into Bowen University, for a one year JUPEB programme around June 2020, after fulfilling their usual admission protocols. I accompanied her to the school when she resumed on November 1, 2020 and was impressed by the school environment. I settled the necessary bills before returning to Port Harcourt. The truth is that I never envisaged or had the slightest inclination that I had apparently taken my daughter to the school for slaughter.

"Almost on daily basis, I called my daughter to check how she was doing. That was the pattern of our communication until Wednesday December 2, 2020 when I called many times and she did not pick my calls. I got worried and called one of the school officials who said there was a network issue in the school but that she will help me reach her. By Friday, I became restless because my daughter never stayed long before returning my calls."

### Harbinger of sad news

Narrating how the sad news of his daughter's death was eventually communicated to him, Engr. Lawani said: "After church service on Sunday, December 6, 2020, my parish priest called that he was on his way to my house.

I was surprised about the visit because he had not been to my house before. When he eventually arrived few minutes later, I saw some people with him. After the usual pleasantries, I took them to my office within the house to know the purpose of their visit.

As we got talking, one of the visitors introduced himself as Rivers Baptist Conference President and I immediately told him that my daughter attends BOWEN University which is owned by the Baptist Church. At that point, he said my daughter was the purpose of their visit. Even before they started narrating what transpired, I knew my daughter was dead.

“The pain I felt that day was unimaginable. I screamed and shouted and immediately asked them to get my wife. When they broke the news to her, she was uncontrollable. It took some time before they could calm her down.

The leader of the delegation told us that Precious slumped and died during morning devotion in the school. I found it hard to believe that my daughter who rarely fell ill would suddenly slump and die as they said, but I had to give them the benefit of doubt at that time.

That same day, I spoke to the Vice-Chancellor who expressed his condolences. Because I initially didn’t suspect any foul play, I gave instruction that she should be buried in Ogbomosho, Oyo State campus of the school where she died according to my tradition. A service of songs was also conducted for her by the school followed by an autopsy which I also supported before she was finally buried.

### **Autopsy report**

An autopsy conducted by a pathologist from the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, LAUTECH and sighted by Encounter, stated Precious’ cause of death as ‘intracranial haemorrhage, skull fracture and blunt force trauma.’ The report indicated that Precious’ other body organs were normal. BOWEN officials and the Lawani family representatives were present when the autopsy was carried out.

### **School account of event versus Lawani’s findings**

After the autopsy report, BOWEN University authorities conducted an investigation to ascertain the cause of Precious’ death. The undated school report sighted by Encounter revealed that the 19-year-old Precious who was to handle an aspect of the morning devotion slumped and was rushed to the school hospital where emergency treatment was administered on her before she died.

The report indicated that some days before the incident, Precious had been acting unwell and was advised to visit the clinic. The report further stated that no one knew exactly what caused Precious to fall during the prayer session since the students closed their eyes. On the likely cause of death, the report suggested that the fall may be attributed to “absence of seizure, shock, dehydration, stress or fractured skull as a result of fall.”

### **Engr Lawani’s findings**

Not satisfied with the findings of BOWEN school management, Engr. Lawani told Encounter that he decided to conduct a discreet investigation on the matter.

“A lot of things did not add up with the report issued by the school so I decided to ask questions among my late daughter’s classmates.

“What I found was very shocking as one of the students revealed that my daughter had issues with some of the girls in her hostel before the morning devotion where she purportedly slumped and died.

“Secondly, I found that the place used for the morning devotion was a narrow, elevated platform with no protective measures. Also, the school, while briefing me about Precious’ death, said she slumped and convulsed before she was rushed to the school’s hospital.

“My daughter rarely fell sick; so I seriously doubted the conclusion by the school that my daughter had convulsion. I asked the school to produce my daughter’s medical file but up till now, they have not answered me.

“Some students who were present when the incident happened said they heard a loud noise like a bomb when my daughter fell.

What would have made her to fall with such force? The school hurriedly conducted an investigation without involving an independent entity just to exonerate itself. They said my daughter's death was a mystery but I refuse to accept that.

“The school ought to have conducted a thorough investigation to reveal the truth of what really happened. That is not too much to ask from a faith-based institution which parents see as a good environment for their children.”

### **Alleges police extortion**

Engr. Lawani told Encounter that the Police took over the case last year and he had to travel on many occasions to Osun State when the Investigating Police Officer, IPO, requested his presence. He expressed shock that despite being a grieving father, the Police officer in charge of the matter still demanded money from him.

He said: “When the Police took over the matter, I was initially optimistic, believing that the truth will be unravelled. I had to travel from Port Harcourt to Osogbo, Osun State any time I was needed at the Police station. As the case progressed, the Police officer in charge of the matter started demanding money from me to assist with the investigation.

“After giving him over N150,000 and he kept asking for more, I just gave up on the matter. The IPO later said that there was no witness to the incident leading to my daughter's death and as such, the case would be closed.”

### **National Assembly intervention**

Following a petition he wrote to the leadership of the National Assembly on the matter, Lawani said the House of Representatives Committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions summoned BOWEN school management to a hearing.

Although Encounter did not see any written report of the findings and conclusion of the committee, Engr. Lawani said he demanded the truth about his daughter's death and that she should be immortalised by naming any edifice in the school after her.

### **Demand**

“By the grace of God, I am a comfortable and contented man and do not need monetary compensation for my daughter's death. What I want is the truth. There is a cover-up somewhere and my daughter's spirit cannot rest until the truth about how she was ‘killed’ is revealed. My daughter was killed like a fowl and somebody is shielding those behind her death. I know that nothing can bring back my daughter but I want the truth about her death revealed. Once that is done, I will forgive those behind her death and leave everything to God.”

### **School reacts**

When contacted, the Public Relations Officer of BOWEN, Mr. Toba Daramola said the institution would not want to join issues with EngrLawani on the circumstances surrounding the death of his daughter in the school but would rather wait for the outcome of investigation by the Police and House of Representatives Committee.

He said: “We are very much aware of the matter and EngrLawani has taken the matter to the Police and the National Assembly where we appeal. We expect that he should wait for the report of the Police and National Assembly on the matter.

“We cannot do anything until the reports are out. He has approached the two institutions with petition and not until they reach a finding before we can do anything. BOWEN is a Christian school and we sympathise with him on the loss of his child but that does not mean he has to be going everywhere smearing the image of the school.”

