

I saw hell in abusive marriage — 28-yr-old orphan jailed for killing husband

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- regrets enduring brutality for love
- seeks custody of her children in orphanage

By Henry Ojelu & Esther Onyegbula

AS a teenager, Olamide Akinbobola's biggest dream was to marry a good man and raise a home filled with love. That dream was fuelled by the fact that she never enjoyed the love of a mother or father. Her mother was a mentally unstable woman, who roamed the streets of Lagos and nobody knew how she became pregnant.

Olamide was born and raised by her mother on the dirty corners of the street. When her mother passed away a few years after, her grandfather took custody of her. Under her grandfather's care, rather than abate, Olamide's turbulent childhood continued as the old man passed her from one relative to another. By the time she turned 21, Olamide had suffered unimaginable torrents of abuse and deprivation.

Despite her ordeal, Olamide continued to keep hope alive believing that one day, she would meet a man with whom she would build the kind of loving home that she never had. That wish came earlier than she expected when Dare Akinbobola, a young man she had met while on errand, professed undying love for her. Few months into their relationship, the duo were married in a very humble traditional marriage ceremony.

Early signs of trouble

After the marriage, the couple stayed back in the one room apartment, where Dare was living in his family house. Olamide was uncomfortable with the arrangement, but , resigned to fate since there was no money to rent an apartment elsewhere. Olamide soon became the breadwinner of the home because Dare didn't have any steady means of income. Despite her efforts, Dare suddenly turned into a horrible, unchecked beast, who pounced on her at every vexation. Several times, Dare's family members prevailed on him to stop the beating, but rather than stop, the beating increased, warranting them to send him and Olamide out of the house.



Beating continues

Olamide managed to secure another apartment in Ikorodu, where she and Dare, who had momentarily become remorseful, moved into. She took up a teaching job in a local school and would also do other menial jobs to sustain the family. Soon after the arrival of their first child, Dare resumed his beating and this time it got worse. Their fighting soon became a public spectacle in the community as neighbours would often gather to watch them.

Appeals to Dare fell on deaf ears. Olamide momentarily packed out of the house, but, soon returned when she realised that she was pregnant with her second child. She endured even more serious beatings throughout the pregnancy until the unexpected happened a month after her delivery.

The big fight

Recounting the incident that led to the fight, Olamide said: "I had just finished cooking rice when I pleaded with my husband to give me N50 to add to what I had so I can take okada to the school where I teach. I was on three months maternity leave but I insisted on resuming work so that we can have money for feeding as my husband has refused to get a job or continue with his generator repairing job.

"He refused to give me the money and an argument ensued. I left him alone, and turned to dish out the rice I just cooked into a small cooler that I will take to school. Before I knew what was happening, my husband locked the door and pounced on me. He punched me, grabbed my neck, slammed my face to the floor and sat on my tummy. I thought I was going to pass out so I stretched my hand to pick up anything to hit him to get him to release his grip and stop punching me.

“My hand touched something metallic; it was the knife I used earlier to cut onions. I said to myself, let me just prick his shoulder so he can release me. I stabbed the shoulder a little; it worked as he released his grasp. I quickly stood up, opened the door and ran out. He ran after me from the front of the house to the back street. I kept running while crying for help until I noticed I couldn’t hear his footsteps again.

“I looked back and saw him on the floor. I thought he was pretending, so I walked back slowly and cautiously to him. On getting closer, I noticed that he wasn’t moving, I shook him thinking this must be a prank but lo and behold, my husband was dead. I ran screaming for help, calling on people around to help me take him to the hospital. When people came and checked him, he was already dead.

Journey to prison

Olamide’s journey to prison began with that sad incident in 2018. She was subsequently arrested by policemen from Igbogbo Police Station, Ikorodu and later transferred to State Police Criminal Investigation Department, CID, Panty, Yaba. After her arraignment at the Ebute Meta Chief Magistrate’s Court for murder, she was remanded in Kirikiri Prisons on the orders of Chief Magistrate O.A. Komolafe.

Battle to save Olamide

Convinced of her innocence, some well-meaning Nigerians rallied round to save Olamide from being sentenced to death. While some individuals embarked on public campaign for leniency for the young woman, Jennichi Foundation spearheaded the struggle to ensure that Olamide is well-represented in court. For three years, Senior Advocate of Nigeria, SAN, Babatunde Ogala with Olabisi Oridate took up the legal battle to save Olamide from the hangman’s verdict.

After a sterling argument from the defence team, the trial judge reconsidered the death sentence stipulation for the charges against Olamide and instead sentenced her to one year imprisonment for manslaughter on September 24, 2021. Before the verdict, she had spent three years already, awaiting trial since the offence for which she was charged was not bailable. While in prison, Olamide’s two children were handed over to an orphanage home as there was nobody to take care of them.

Release from prison

After serving her jail term, Olamide walked out of prison a free woman on May 24, 2022. Narrating her prison experience to Encounter, Olamide said: I spent four years in prison on the incident. What I went through was not easy. When the incident happened, I almost ran mad, because it was not something I did intentionally. If it was intentional, I would have run away but I took him to the hospital and unfortunately, I lost him. While in the facility, through counselling and encouragement from people and organisations that visit prisons, I have learnt to be patient, tolerant and friendly. It is not everything you see you talk about.”

Lessons

On what she would have done differently to avoid the ugly incident that led her to prison, Olamide said she would have left the marriage immediately the beating started. “I endured the beating because I loved my husband and wanted a home for my children. I went through hell in that abusive marriage and endured the beating and humiliation.”

Advising people to immediately flee from any abusive relationship or marriage, she said: “Once there is domestic violence, run. My ordeal began the moment I chose to stay in an abusive marriage. I stayed because I thought it will get better. If I had run away when I had the opportunity to, I wouldn’t have killed him in self-defense nor would I have spent four years of my life in prison.”

Jennichi Foundation’s intervention

Jennifer Owolabi, Director, Jennichi Foundation spoke to Encounter on the effort her foundation put in to ensure that Olamide’s case received the appropriate attention and sympathy of the justice system. She said: “It has been traumatic since we took up this case. I got interested in Olamide’s case after I read what happened and how

neighbours in her community spoke very highly of her effort to make her marriage work despite the constant abuse and beating by her late husband. I tracked her to their house and later to the police station, then Panti.”

“My Foundation had to do an autopsy for Olamide’s husband and bury him as his family members were not willing to come for his corpse. We managed to get hold of one of his step brothers to join me at the cemetery as witnesses. Apart from being at the court at every sitting while Olamide was awaiting trial in Kirikiri Female Prisons, we kept visiting the orphanage where her children were with supplies and also to see how they were doing.”

“Although Jennichi Foundation rented an apartment for Olamide, she still needs financial empowerment to enable her to have custody of her children, who are still at the orphanage. Olamide’s desire to reunite with her children has not been possible because of the processes involved, which requires she must have a comfortable shelter, where she will be staying with her children, proof of her means of income to show that she can take care of her two children. She will also need to prove that her children will not stop their education. My foundation is making passionate appeal to members of the public to support our effort to reunite Olamide with her children and empower her to take care of them.”

Support for Olamide Akinbobola can be sent to Jennichi International Acct No. 1023417598 (UBA)