Fractured life…A five-year-old’s tortuous journey from rape to hospital and orphanage

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Fractured life…A five-year-old’s tortuous journey from rape to hospital and orphanage  
  
The sexual assault of a five-year-old by a teenage boy incapacitated her for five months but the story has not ended. Onimisi Alao reports.  
  
Aisha, five, has just been discharged from the hospital after five months on admission, and three surgeries to correct the harm done to her by Adamu Abdullahi, the neighbour, who allegedly raped her. Aisha’s recuperation, however, marks the beginning of another struggle. A life-long one perhaps, fraught with challenges that threaten to mar her irregular life.  
  
The minor has been certified ‘okay’ medically, but her life is not okay, as she hasn’t the luxury of returning to a normal life. Aisha has been denied the luxury of a cosy family home.  
  
Her ordeal began in August, last year, precisely August 23, when she was found half-dead after 16-year-old Abdullahi allegedly pounced on her and ravaged her young body.  
  
The Adamawa State Police Command eventually arrested Abdullahi, a resident of Jambutu in Jimeta, Yola North Local Government Area, for allegedly defiling the five-year-old girl and inflicting serious injury on her.  
  
The Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) of the state command, Sulaiman Nguroje, said Abdullahi used the cover of a downpour, that fateful Friday, August 23, 2019, to molest the five-year-old, thereby causing her serious harm.  
  
In the wake of the assault, the victim was rushed to the Federal Medical Centre (FMC) in Yola, where the doctors engaged in a frantic battle to repair her damaged genitals. The damage to Aisha had been extensive and scary. Doctors at the FMC engaged in a desperate battle to save her life. The rape had caused severe damage to her rectum and womb.  
  
Although the doctors would not discuss her ordeal in any graphic detail, photos emerged online, portraying lesions on the private parts of the child, revealing mutilations of the genitals. The doctors said the assault on Aisha incapacitated her from walking.  
  
Dr. Sexana, a pediatrician, who was the first to respond to her when she was brought in distressed, said a minor surgery had to be carried out immediately to stabilise Aisha, adding that a major corrective surgery would be necessary to put her back together.  
  
The damage following the sexual assault on the little girl had been extensive. According to Police spokesman Ngurore, “The family of the victim refused to report the case. It was when they realised that the condition of the victim was bad and they could not manage it, that they took her to the hospital.  
  
“The attention of the police was drawn and they took her to the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (situated in the premises of the state Specialist Hospital in Jimeta, Yola). When they found that she would need a surgical operation, they transferred her to the Federal Medical Centre where she was admitted.”  
  
While Aisha was undergoing treatment at FMC, the police launched a manhunt for Abdullahi and arrested him. In the wake of his arrest, the culprit’s age was initially given as 19. It is unclear now how that rumour broke out but it soon became verifiable public knowledge that his actual age was 16.  
  
At the backdrop of the controversy, a long-drawn debate ensued over the appropriate detention facility for the culprit pending his arraignment in court. That started after he was suddenly transferred from detention at a correctional centre to a remand home.  
  
Insinuations were rife that the culprit’s age was suddenly reduced from 19 to 16 in order to justify his treatment as a minor; so doing, he could not be treated as an adult and be detained as one. In the heat of the debate, Adamawa State governor, Ahmadu Fintiri, instructed that he be returned to prison detention. That ‘order’ merely assuaged public anger for a little while. It achieved nothing else as Abdullahi remained at the remand home.  
  
It gave rise to the public refrain that while the alleged rapist was enjoying himself at a remand home, being fed by the state, the child he assaulted was lying critically ill in hospital and unsure of where her medical supplies and welfare needs would come from.  
  
Observers, including a non-medical hospital staff and one of her care givers, got the idea that little Aisha went under the surgical knives five times, but Dr Adewale Oyinloye, one of the paediatric surgeons who worked on her, said it was not exactly so.  
  
Dr Adewale, who spoke to our correspondent when the child was being prepared for the final surgery, said what laymen regarded as a pending fifth surgery would actually be the third. The doctor explained: “She (Aisha) has done very well up to now. She still has one more operation to go, which is to close the bowel that was brought out.  
  
“We had to divert her stool in order to have a very good repair of the area of injury. Now that she has healed well, the next surgery is to return the bowel and then she will be able to leave the hospital.  
  
“The next is not the fifth surgery. The first was a repair surgery. The next one was just to inspect the integrity of the repair surgery. So, she is going for the third surgery.”  
  
In the surgeon’s words, it was a simple case, but to laymen, including caregivers to the child, it wasn’t as simple as it was cracked up to be.  
  
“Here is a mere child who for months could not pass faeces through the normal channel because that boy punctured it,” lamented one of the caregivers. The latter added that it was heartbreaking to see the artificial opening the doctors created “around the little girl’s belly” just so she could pass out bodily waste.  
  
Notwithstanding, Aisha could be described as a lucky child. At her admission at the FMC, Yola, on August 23, 2019, the hospital immediately started attending to her even as money was not forthcoming from anybody connected to the girl or her state.  
  
This was, according to the Information Officer of the hospital, Mohammed Dodo, in line with the policy of the hospital to treat emergency cases with recourse to the hospital Paupers Fund until money could be sourced from the patient.  
  
The hospital thus started treatment, but soon found it had to continue to do so on its own account.  
  
The hospital discovered that Aisha was from a disjointed household. It was revealed that her father was in prison. A version of the story had it that the father stood surety for someone who jumped bail; consequently, he was picked up and put away at a correctional facility in far away Lagos.  
  
It remains unclear whether he is serving a sentence duly prescribed by a court of law, but he has been absent for years, immediately after Aisha was born.  
  
Further findings revealed that Aisha was with her paternal grandmother in Yola at the time she was violently defiled. The mother, who allegedly left Yola to pursue her life elsewhere after her husband, Aisha’s father, got into trouble, only surfaced after the minor’s defilement and her admission at the hospital.  
  
Since Aisha’s father was unavailable and nobody in the family was forthcoming with funds, the hospital continued to shoulder expenses on her, with other organisations, including the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (Hope Centre), where she was first taken, and some individuals, including a rights activist, Hauwa Garba, giving a hand, especially with feeding and with drugs not readily available at the FMC.  
  
The FMC Information Officer, Mohammed Dodo, who disclosed what the hospital was doing for Aisha, said apart from the surgeries and medical supplies that were administered to the victim, free of charge, the special intensive care ward in which Aisha stayed was quite expensive.  
  
Aisha was finally discharged on January 28, 2020, five months after she was admitted. But she moved out of the hospital into an orphanage. This, The Nation findings revealed, was the initiative of the state government; a temporary measure predicated on the reality of her dysfunctional family background.  
  
Garba said: “Aisha was taken to orphanage home. The one opposite Federal Secretariat (in Yola). She was taken there with her sisters and her mum. Thanks to Her Excellency, the First Lady, Governor Ahmadu Fintiri has given her mum a job. She is to work as a caterer with the state government.  
  
“They were taken to the orphanage because they don’t have a home for now. The house they had, her grandfather’s house, in which her grandmother stayed with her in Yola town, has been sold and the grandfather has moved back to Maiduguri, his base.  
  
“So, the safest place for her for now as decided by the wife of the governor and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development is the orphanage. It’s a government establishment and will take care of their feeding for now.”  
  
It remains to be seen how long Aisha, her siblings and their mother would manage at the orphanage.  
  
Retired civil servant and businessman whose daughter, Asma’u Joda, leads a group, Adamawa Coalition Against Rape (ACAR), had been a quiet supporter of efforts against rape. Reacting to Aisha’s ordeal, he said: “Rape is an offence that is abhorred by the society as a whole. The situation we have now is a pitiful one. I have followed a case of a five-year-old who was raped and abandoned. Neither Christianity nor Islam tolerates even adultery between consenting adults, much less the defilement of minors as young as five; we should not tolerate that.”  
  
Blaming the police and the judiciary for theseemingly increasing incidence of rape, he added: “I am sorry to mention that the police, which is the first point of call for victims, is not playing its role. It became worse when the judiciary became complacent; a simple case that should take few weeks will be allowed to go on for years.”  
  
Joda said dragging such cases for long is usually a deliberate attempt to jettison justice. And not a few are seeing what they believe to be an attempt to jettison justice in the case of Adamu Abdullahi, the teenager, who raped five-year-old Aisha.