My rape ordeal in Nigerian Army making other female victims contact me – Discharged soldier

Date: 2024-09-29

Source: https://punchng.com/my-rape-ordeal-in-nigerian-army-making-other-female-victims-contact-me-discharged-soldier/

A former soldier, Ruth Ogunleye, while speaking with BIODUN BUSARI, recounts her nightmarish ordeal of alleged sexual assault perpetrated by her superior, at the Nigerian Army Cantonment Medical Centre, Ojo, Lagos  
  
You made allegations of sexual assault against your superior while you were in the Nigerian Army. How did it happen?  
  
This incident occurred in 2022 when I was serving in the Medical Corps at the Nigerian Army Cantonment Medical Centre, Ojo, Lagos. The Colonel (name withheld) was the commanding officer at the time. I had only been in the unit for three weeks when he started sending me gifts, which I refused to accept.  
  
On February 27, 2022, he called and summoned me to meet him at the Eagleston Hotel by 5pm. When I arrived, he said he wanted to have sex with me. He offered me N50,000 to do that and even promised to help me get admitted into a military school. I refused, reminding him that it was against the Nigerian Army’s code of conduct for superiors to engage in sexual relations with subordinates.  
  
After that encounter, he became vindictive and began to maliciously deal with me, subjecting me to extra duties and unjust punishment.  
  
He later began injecting me with largactil, a drug typically administered to mentally ill patients to sedate them.  
  
Were you conscious while he was injecting you?  
  
Yes, but I had no choice. He would either point a gun at me or have soldiers pin me down before injecting me. Sometimes, he would personally handcuff me. He would also instruct the doctors in our unit to administer the drug. After being injected, I would be unconscious for days, completely unable to function.  
  
After sexually assaulting me, he would put me in a body bag and order that I be dumped at a psychiatric hospital.  
  
This happened several times. He didn’t allow me to attend any military courses. He denied me access to school. He didn’t allow me to visit my parents even during festive periods. I didn’t benefit from anything.  
  
Sometimes, he would instruct soldiers to come to my house and bring me. They would come to my house at midnight and give me the injection. There was a time he kept me in his office for four days.  
  
There was a time when the ex-President of the Nigerian Army Officers’ Wives Association, Mrs Salamatu Yahaya came to commission a maternity ward at the cantonment where I worked at the time. She came as the wife of the former Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant-General Farouk Yahaya. During that period, I was inside the colonel’s office lying unconscious when she came. He knew very well that the NAOWA president would inspect his office. However, that day, I was still feeling very unconscious after he had sexually molested me. He, then, ordered a National Youth Service Corps member (name withheld), who is a doctor in the unit, to give me a particular injection that neutralised the largactil injection he gave me. When I regained consciousness, I saw myself naked.  
  
Did the NAOWA president come into the office where you were?  
  
The woman and other dignitaries were still at the back of his office for the commissioning ceremony, and he was with them. Before they entered the office, the doctor, following the colonel’s orders, instructed me to dress up quickly and exit through the front gate. As I looked back and saw the crowd of people, I realised that was why he had asked me to leave that way. After that incident, the doctor routinely gave me another injection to counter the effects of the largactil injection.  
  
Did he ask you out before inviting you to the hotel?  
  
It was embarrassing because he never did. He was my boss, so, I hardly saw him. In the army, you will go through many protocols before you see your superiors. I was even surprised that he called me because I was new in the unit. Just like that, he asked me to sleep with him without initially asking me out.  
  
You mentioned being ordered to be taken to the psychiatric hospital. What was that experience like?  
  
Most times, I spent up to one month at the psychiatric hospital without being placed on medication. Whenever I was kept there, he would seize my phone and ATM card.  
  
From your account, are you suggesting that your colleagues in the unit were aware of the sexual assault and other forms of harassment you experienced?  
  
Yes. All the personnel in my unit were aware. They witnessed everything because he didn’t hide what he was doing. Some of those who were bold enough to confront him got posted out of the cantonment to the North. At one point, he instructed the personnel in the unit not to speak with me.  
  
There was also a civilian doctor who he asked to write a report that I had a mental illness but the doctor refused. So, he made sure that the doctor got sacked.  
  
Did your colleagues show concerns and wanted to help you at those trying times?  
  
Some of my colleagues asked me to apply for a four-year course that would take me out of the unit. It was expected that after that four years, I would not be posted to that unit again and probably, he might not be there by then.  
  
All the advice amounted to nothing because he refused to approve my application as my boss. I even went to the school – the Nigerian Army Medical School, Lagos – and it was ascertained that I was given admission.  
  
The colonel blocked my application, claiming I was mentally ill. He continued to ensure that I couldn’t progress in my career, either by ensuring I didn’t attend courses or get promoted.  
  
There was a time I also applied for admission at the Nigerian Army School of Supply and Transport, Benin City, Edo State, but he refused to let me go.  
  
Did you make any effort to escape the sexual harassment and intimidation?  
  
In the army, commissioned officers are not allowed to date uncommissioned soldiers. The Nigerian Army frowns at it, so it is an offence. I was not paying attention to the man at first when he was giving me the injection.  
  
Sometimes, I could get injected thrice a week. This affected my tongue and body system. It got to a point that I was not comfortable with it again. He denied me access to calls. I could not go anywhere. If I applied for any course, he would use his influence to tell them not to give me admission.  
  
After a while, I summoned the courage to seek redress, but in the military, such grievances need to pass through your superior officer. The colonel never forwarded my complaints. It wasn’t until I contacted the current Chief of Defence Staff, Gen. C.G Musa, that I received a response.  
  
However, at that time, he simply advised me to “endure” the situation and did not take any concrete steps to address the issue.  
  
At the time, he had not assumed the position of the CDS. I begged him to persuade the colonel to let me go for a course. Apart from the fact that I wanted to leave the unit, I would not be promoted if I didn’t go to school. Moreso, I couldn’t fight him because if I did, I wouldn’t win.  
  
Later, he intervened and told me that my former boss said I had a mental illness. He told me that he was not in the medical line, so he could not do anything.  
  
He made me to understand that he was an infantry officer, which I knew as well, and advised me not to be in a hurry.  
  
Eventually, after exhausting all options, I sought advice from the Army Legal Service and was guided through the process of submitting a redress for the third time. I also visited the Provost Commander, Brigadier-General M.L Abubakar at Kofo Abayomi, Victoria Island, who was surprised by my story and assured me that I had the right to seek justice.  
  
When my redress got to the board, they just viewed me as someone who should come, talk and leave. I was expecting that they would ask for my evidence. They did not ask for witnesses or evidence. They just decided to allow the matter to die. With this, my former boss continued his act.  
  
What led to your eventual discharge?  
  
In January 2024, after making a video about my experience on social media, I was invited by the Nigerian Army Military Police for an investigation. The Minister of Women Affairs, Mrs. Uju Kennedy-Ohanenye, got involved and took me for various tests, including drug and mental health evaluations.  
  
The results were clear – I was not using drugs, and I did not have any mental illness.  
  
During the investigation, the minister asked me what I wanted, and I told her that I no longer had any interest in continuing my military career. She then advised me to apply for voluntary discharge.  
  
However, since I had only served for five years, I wouldn’t be eligible for any pension benefits. The minister promised to help me secure a job at the Ministry of Women Affairs through the First Lady, Senator Oluremi Tinubu.  
  
Later, I was contacted by the Chief of Army Staff, who informed me that the Army would compensate me with a medical discharge that would entitle me to pension benefits.  
  
Were there other female soldiers facing similar sexual assault from their superiors?  
  
Yes. After I shared my story online, specifically on TikTok, some other female soldiers reached out to me. They told me about their experiences and I shared their stories on my page. But, I cannot reveal their identities as they are still in the service. They were too afraid to come forward publicly for fear of losing their jobs.  
  
What steps did your family take during this saga?  
  
I reported him to my dad after I exhausted all the options I had at that time. My dad requested his phone number and called him. When my father asked him why he was treating me unfairly, all he told my father was that he should tell me ‘to obey the last order.’ It was at that moment that I told my father that he wanted to be sleeping with me.  
  
Why did you dare the Nigerian Army to publish the report of the investigation?  
  
I knew the truth of what happened, and I had evidence to support my claims. During the investigation, the military police even confided in me that I had won the case. So I dared the Nigerian Army to make the report public because I believe in the strength of my evidence.