Children with Cerebral Palsy, no option but to kill

Hannah Awadzi

She is a domestic worker; she goes from house to house looking for domestic chores to do for money. She was introduced to me by a friend when I told her I wanted someone to come and help me with laundry.

For the purposes of this article, I will call her Yaa (not her real name). I told her to come every two weeks to do the washing and she never misses an appointment

However, I noticed she looked at me intently anytime, she saw me carry my daughter Eyram living with cerebral palsy to the car, and at one point, I told my friend that I feel there is something Yaa wants to tell me but she probably finds it difficult to do so.

So, on one fateful day, I was pressed and I needed to go to work, my daughter was at home, it was going to be an inconvenient carrying her along to work, I needed someone to take care of her. I was therefore compelled to call Yaa to come and take care of the child that day for a fee, and she obliged.

By 7.30 AM she was there ready to start with her task for the day. I sat her down and took her through my daughter’s routine, she seems to know a lot about Cerebral Palsy. Surprised! I asked, why you have handled such a child before?

Then she started narrating her story to me in tears. “In 1994, I had a bouncy baby boy, three days later, she had jaundiced so I sent her to the Children’s Hospital in Accra, after about a week of admission, we were discharged home and that was when our woes started”.

It was one hospital visit after another, using all the money (my husband and I) to pay for hospital bills with no concrete results.

Yaa said, the boy could not sit, he was very floppy, doctors recommended physiotherapy and she obliged. She had to journey about one and half hours to the hospital for physiotherapy and she did this, twice a week.

Besides the cost in transportation to the hospital for physiotherapy services, she got very stressed, after a year of physiotherapy she stopped.

Friends and family members convinced her, that what she was facing was spiritual and so she started following some of them to their churches. It was a hop from one pastor to another, herbalists, spiritualists and the list was endless.

“I spent all my money seeking help for my baby boy,” Pastors, herbalists and spiritualists alike charged me huge sums of money with the promise to help heal my baby boy but to no avail.”

Apart from that Yaa no longer had the “luxury” to work, she sat by this boy every time, there were times, she spent a whole month at a prayer camp and pastors told her horrible stories.

“One pastors even forbid me to stop eating tomatoes, I had to obliged but I no longer enjoyed eating, my life was misery.”

Yaa said she finally went to a spiritualist who told her plainly that the child could not be healed and actually he (her baby boy) was sent to destroy her life spiritually.

The spiritualist said, he could help her to get rid of the baby without suspicion.

In her own word she said: “We agreed to see the baby off, the agreed day soon came and the man came and gave the child some herbal concoction, with the assurance that my boy will not wake up again. I paid the spiritualist off.

“True to his word, the child slept but what followed wasn’t to be expected, for three days the child was sleeping, he wasn’t crying, he was just sleeping, I tried waking him up but he wouldn’t and I knew the child was not dead.

“I started getting worried, what can be done, I couldn’t also reach the man, one week passed and the situation remained the same, I knew there was trouble.”

Yaa said, she also did not have the courage to take the boy to the hospital, knowing what she had agreed to do and so sat beside the baby just waiting for him to “go in peace”.

According to her, after 12 days, when the baby was still not dead and continued to sleep she decided to take him to her village and seek elderly advice, however, the baby died after 14 days of sleep and was buried.”

I looked intently at her, not angry but moved with pity and asked but why did you agree to this “plan” and this was her response:

“Friends mocked me that I have given birth to a spirit child, family rejected me, those who came in to help me rather worsened the situation by sending me to places where I was told all kind of things.

“I attempted to take the child to crèche to even enable me work but all of them rejected him.

I could not afford the medical bills since I was not working, everybody seems to exploit me because I had a child with cerebral palsy. I had no option but to kill!”

The big question is: Can the society blame Yaa for what happened?

As the Executive Director of The Special Mothers’ Project, a not-for-profit organization that seeks to advocate for families of children with cerebral palsy, I come face to face with mothers faced with similar situations.

In our Ghanaian society, once you give birth to a special needs child, you are on your own, it is usually one superstitious story after another. No education systems for such children, no caregiver support, a healthcare system that does not consider the peculiar needs of families raising children with cerebral palsy and other special needs, it becomes a huge burden on the family and it cost an arm and a leg to get the required support.

How I wish that government paid more attention to such issues and ensure that families with special needs children get some social support to enable them keep living

I agree that a community, society or nation is worth dying for, if it takes care of her vulnerable.