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In Lagos kerosene fire, a twin dies

By Seye Olumide

THE couple, Valentine and Assumpta Njoku had their hands full.

They had two sets of twins, Judith and Juliet all girls and the boys, Hilary and Humphrey.

There were also three other children, making them a family of nine in their No. 10, Oguntade Street, Shasha Akowonjo, Lagos' two-room apartment.

Devoted Catholics, Valentine and his wife worked hard, knowing the task ahead of raising seven bright children.

Five of the children slept in the parlour while Hilary and Humphrey shared the bedroom with their parents.

Last Thursday, disaster struck and the cold hands of death closed round one of the twins.

The family had dined and was getting ready to go to bed at about 10.00 p.m. last Thursday, when Assumpta noticed that light from the lantern was going down, which meant it had run out of kerosene and she knew she should put some kerosene into the lantern in case there was power outage in the night.

She had earlier in the day sent one of the older children to buy kerosene at Texaco Filling Station at Olukosi Bus Stop, Shasha.

No sooner had she poured the kerosene into the lantern, which was already lit, than it exploded and the entire room was set ablaze.

The woman, her husband along with Hilary and Humphrey were trapped in the flames that engulfed the room.

Neighbours were roused by the cries of the other children who were sleeping in the parlour who ran out calling for help, screaming that there was a fire and that their parents and brothers were in the room.

Before help came, Hilary and Humphrey had been badly burnt.

Their mother sustained serious burns on her left hand, breast and leg.

The father, Valentine, was burnt in the legs while everything in the room was destroyed.

One of the twins, Hilary died before they reached the hospital while Humphrey is still on life support at Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) Idi-Araba."

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Narrating the incident to The Guardian on her sick bed yesterday, Assumpta, yet to be informed about the death of one of her children said she had faith her children would all recover and soon, too.

As she spoke in tears, affirming her belief that her children would live, her neighbours and members of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Church, Oke Shasha where she worshipped were in anguish as they could not tell her one of the twins, Hilary, was dead already.

According to her: "On Thursday, I sent my eldest child to buy kerosene at Texaco Filling Station at Olukosi Shasha when I noticed that the one in the house would not last us over the night.

"Fortunately, I did not cook much that day so the one I bought was just to be reserved for the next day. "However, while we were about going to bed I decided to fill the lantern with some of the kerosene I sent my child to buy at the filling station, which was my usual practice every night before going to bed, in case of power outage.

"As soon as I poured the kerosene into the lantern, which was lit already, it exploded and the entire room went up in flames.

"All I was hearing thereafter were shouts for help from my children. I could not even summon the strength to help either my twins or their father.

"I managed to gather some strength and discovered that four of us had been badly hurt in the incident. Initially, we were rushed to Ile-Epo General Hospital and Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH),

Ikeja but we were turned back. There was no space.

"We were later taken to Lagos University Teaching Hospital (LUTH) where we were admitted.

" Since then I have not seen my twins to know how they are. But I believe we would get over it.

"My husband, too, who was also hurt could not afford to stay on admission because he has to look for money."

As Assumpta narrated her ordeal, she would raise her left arm at intervals complaining of severe pains as she pondered in agony what they were going through.

"Our greatest concern now is how to pay the huge bills. We are petty traders and my husband who also needs medical treatment has had to forgo his in order to find the money."

In the male ward where he was admitted, Humphrey lay on his belly in severe pain.

It was clear only God could guarantee his survival as he was swaddled in gauze, the life support instrument stuck into his nose.

Other reports available to The Guardian indicate that it may not only be the Njoku family that has suffered from what many fear may be adulterated kerosene the disaster of the adulterated kerosene.

Four other families who were reported to have bought kerosene in the same filling station experienced explosions and fire outbreaks and were receiving treatment at different hospitals.

When The Guardian tried to make enquiries from the station on Tuesday, workers there denied selling adulterated kerosene.

With the incidents, Lagosians are now wary of using kerosene as some have called on government to quickly look into the matter before it causes further damage.

A neighbour at Shasha, Bunmi Adeoye told The Guardian she dreaded the return of killer kerosene in Lagos.

Said she: "Millions of Lagosians depend on kerosene for domestic use and one can imagine what the disaster would be if the situation is allowed to continue.

"Now, the commodity is scarce and expensive. Government should not allow some enemies of peace to set poor families on fire."

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