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Family loses 10-month-old baby to kerosene explosion:

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Published: Saturday, 2 Aug 2008

Tripple J Clinic and Maternity, Egbeda, Lagos has lately been playing host to tens of friends, relations and sympathisers of two patients.

Mr. Bukola Adeoye and his wife became guests of the hospital after they lost their 10-month-old baby to a kerosene explosion and only narrowly escaped death themselves.

It all began at their 9, Tolu Aluko Street, Idimu, Lagos residence last Saturday, when the stove with which Adeoye's wife was cooking exploded, inflicting serious injuries on Baby Faith. Unfortunately, she never recovered from these injuries.

Given the dismal energy crisis in the country, a complete escape from the use of kerosene is difficult. Those who do not use it for cooking, use it in lanterns, which have become essential household appliances in many homes as a result of outage. Such was the case of the Adeoyes.

Adeoye, an engineer, told Saturday Punch on his hospital bed on Tuesday that he was finding it difficult to come to terms with the tragic death of the baby, whom he described as a victim of the get-rich-quick attitude of some people.

Also, he could not stop blaming himself for patronising an obscure outlet instead of the major ones he was used to. 'I used to buy all my petrol and kerosene from Oando and Texaco filling stations,' he said. 'But there was fuel scarcity on that day and we desperately needed kerosene. I went to the Texaco and Oando filling stations in my area, but they had none. It was only at Kings Petroleum, a private filling station in the area, that kerosene was available. Although I have always had my fears about private filling stations, I had no choice but to go there, he said.

He recalled that he had earlier contended with the suspicion that he was short-changed by the station attendants who dispensed the kerosene to him. 'I took a 20-litre jerry can to the station, but after buying 25 litres of kerosene, the keg was still not full. I grew annoyed and told them my mind. I did not see why 25 litres of kerosene could not fill a 20-litre container.

After an argument with the attendant, Adeoye took his kerosene-filled jerry can and headed home. His wife, Bukola (same name as her husband?), recalled that as soon as Adeoye brought the kerosene home penultimate Wednesday, she poured it into the stove and started cooking with it. 'And I did not notice any problem with the kerosene in the stove until Saturday night when the stove started acting funny. I called Daddy (Adeoye) to come and look at it.

On entering the kitchen, Adeoye decided to put out the fire. He poured some water into the flame but what he got was an explosive sound that raised the intensity of the fire. 'I decided to take it outside. But as I lifted it and made to leave the kitchen, the stove exploded again and sprayed its content on me and my 10-month-old baby who was close to me. My wife also suffered the same fate and we all suffered varying degrees of burns.

'That I did was to first try to save my family. I pushed my wife and my son, Dominion, out and simultaneously made efforts to put out the fire that was on Faith. But in the end, Faith died while my wife suffered minor burns.

'Our neighbours came and took us to the hospital where Faith was certified dead. We were in so much pain that we could not bury our baby. It was our friends that helped us

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out. We have remained in the hospital since then.

He said he suspected some foul play by those he bought the kerosene from. 'I am an engineer. I have built filling stations for some major marketers, so I have some knowledge of how the whole thing works. Kerosene does not just explode. I have been using kerosene for more than 30 years. Even when there is a little problem with kerosene and you use water, it will stop. But this explosion, I cannot comprehend. I suspect that the filling station mixed another substance with the kerosene.

Adeoye, however, said he knew the filling station but had not been able to go there because he was still bed ridden. 'As soon as I leave the hospital, I will go there. I have the remaining kerosene in a jerry can. I was not careless. Something is wrong with the kerosene. I am a safety conscious person. It is for fear of explosion that I don't use gas.

The manager of Kings Petroleum, Mr Isaac Ogunyemi, however, denied allegations that the station stocked adulterated kerosene. He told the Saturday Punch correspondent, 'I don't sell adulterated kerosene here. I am hearing it from you for the first time.

He said the station got its stock from Zenon Oil. 'I bought 30,000 litres and there had been no complaint. In fact, we finished selling it last week.

Ogunyemi, whose position was corroborated by other attendants at the station, also refuted the allegation that the station was in the habit of cheating on customers. 'You see, my brother, we don't cheat on customers like the man alleged. And we don't sell adulterated kerosene here. We will be happy to meet the man that made these allegations, he said.

A consultant on oil and gas and Managing Director of International Energy Limited, Dr. Diran Fawibe, said the kerosene in question could have been adulterated by some unscrupulous elements who were determined to make quick money.

He said, 'Almost anything in this country can be adulterated. Food, drugs, kerosene and fuel are no exception. What we have to address here is the desperation of people to get this item for their domestic use. They take undue risks and patronise corner sellers just because they want to cook.

Fawibe argued that gas could be the safest method of cooking. 'And we have gas resources. It could be affordable if we utilise it, he said.

He advised that the best way to check cases of adulterated kerosene was to check its scarcity. 'When we can set guidelines for the sellers and mete out appropriate punishment if they fall short of the guidelines, he added.

He said that the victim would do well to report his suspicion to the police who would then get the appropriate body to investigate the filling station.

'It can result from improper handling on the part of the buyer, it can also be the fault of the filling station. Investigation will reveal this, he said.

The police said no formal complaint had been made to them. Spokesman of the Lagos State Police Command, Mr Frank Mba, said the police would be willing to act on the issue as soon as the matter was reported.

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