

Five siblings die in Lagos fire

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Five children between the ages of four and 12 were killed in an inferno in the Kirikiri area of Lagos State on Thursday.

Saturday PUNCH learnt that the five children, Emeka 12, Ifeanyi 10, Chinasa eight, Joy six, and Bright four, who are of the same parents, were burnt alive at their home located at 29 Comfort Oboh Street, Kirikiri.

The parents of the victims were identified as Ogbonna and Margaret Igwuagwu.

Our correspondent learnt that although over 30 people live in the compound, which was completely consumed by the fire, only the five children died.

Sympathisers were said to have surrounded the premises crying and wailing over the incident, while charred remains of the victims were being evacuated.

According to residents, the fire started at about 11.30 pm in the room where the five children were sleeping and later spread to other rooms all made of wood.

The parents of the children were said to have locked them inside the room and lit a candle for them as there was no electricity supply.

Neighbours said it was the usual habit of the parents to lock the children inside the room whenever they were going to their

shop in the evening.

It was learnt that the children slept off while the candle fell, thereby spreading the fire to other parts of the room. Woken by the heat, they were said to have shouted for help while the fire raged, but neighbours were too busy saving themselves.

One of the neighbours said the eldest son, Emeka, had begged his parents not to lock them in but allow them to spend sometime outside but their mother refused.

"I can vividly remember when Mama Emeka ordered her children to go and sleep, saying that she needed to go back to attend to customers who were waiting for her. Emeka, the eldest, pleaded that they should be allowed to stay outside for a while.

"She insisted that they should go to bed since they were to travel the following day. I believe that it was in a bid to prevent them from running out of the house that she locked them inside and went away with the key," she said.

Some neighbours told journalists that they heard the wailing of the children when the fire was raging, but could not break through to rescue them due to a hard burglar proof that was used at the entrance of the room.

According to residents who witnessed the incident, firefighters were informed but could not get to the scene due to bad roads in Kirikiri.

A resident, who wished

to remain anonymous, said, "The road is not passable and there is always traffic congestion in that area. Men of the Naval Fire Service got here first, but they could not help the situation because the damage had already been done."

One of the tenants, Udoh Bassey, whose room was also burnt, told journalists that no one could say exactly what caused the fire.

"It started at about 11.30 pm when some of us were still awake. It was the cry from that room that attracted my attention. The entire compound was razed down before help could come our way. I was able to save a few of my property because my room was located far away from the source of the fire.

"The children died because their parents locked them inside the house and went back to their shops close by. We tried but before we could reach them, there was an explosion from one room to the other as all the other rooms were razed down."

When contacted, spokesperson for the state police command, Ngozi Braide, said the parents of the victims had suffered shock and were rushed to hospital.

"At about 11.20pm, police received a call that a house in Kirikiri was on fire. The house was made of wood and corrugated iron sheets and the fire engulfed it. Five children died in the fire," she said.